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AYALA'S ANGEL

BY

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AUTHOR OF "DOCTOR THORNE," "THE PRIME MINISTER," "ORLEY FARM,"
&c., &c.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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AYALA'S ANGEL.

CHAPTER XXIII.

STALHAM PARK.

ON the day fixed Ayala went down to Stalham. A few days before she started there came to her a letter, or rather an envelope, from her uncle Sir Thomas, enclosing a cheque for £20. The Tringle women had heard that Ayala had been asked to Stalham, and had mentioned the visit disparagingly before Sir Thomas. "I think it very wrong of my poor brother," said Lady Tringle. "She can't have a shilling even to get herself gloves." This had an effect which had not been intended, and Sir Thomas sent the cheque for £20. Then Ayala felt not only that the heavens were opened to her but that the sweetest zephyrs were blowing her on upon her course. Thoughts as to gloves had disturbed her, and as to some shoes which were wanting, and especially as to a pretty hat for winter wear. Now she could get hat and shoes and gloves, and pay her fare, and go down to Stalham with money in her pocket. Before going she wrote a very pretty note to her Uncle Tom.

On her arrival she was made much of by everyone. Lady Albury called her the caged bird, and congratulated her on her escape from the bars. Sir Harry asked her whether she could ride to hounds. Nina gave her a thousand kisses. But perhaps her greatest delight was in finding that Jonathan Stubbs was at Albury. She had become so intimate with the Colonel that she regarded him quite like an old friend ; and when a girl has a male friend, though he may be much less loved, or not loved at all, he is always more pleasant, or at any rate more piquant, than a female friend. As for love with Colonel Stubbs that was quite out of the question. She was sure that he would never fall in love with herself. His manner to her was altogether unlike that of a lover. A lover would be smooth, soft, poetic, and flattering. He was always a little rough to her,—sometimes almost scolding her. But then he scolded her as she liked to be scolded,—with a dash of fun and a greatly predominating admixture of good-nature. He was like a bear,—but a bear who would always behave himself pleasantly. She was delighted when Colonel Stubbs congratulated her on her escape from Kingsbury Crescent, and felt that he was justified by his intimacy when he called Mrs. Dosett a mollified she-Cerberus.

“Are you going to make one of my team?” said the Colonel to her on the morning after her arrival. It was a non-hunting morning, and the gentlemen were vacant about the house till they went out for a little shooting later on in the day.

“What team?” said Ayala, feeling that she had sud-

denly received a check to her happiness. She knew that the Colonel was alluding to those hunting joys which were to be prepared for Nina, and which were far beyond her own reach. That question of riding gear is terrible to young ladies who are not properly supplied. Even had time admitted she would not have dared to use her uncle's money for such a purpose, in the hope that a horse might be lent to her. She had told herself that it was out of the question, and had declared to herself that she was too thankful for her visit to allow any regret on such a matter to cross her mind. But when the Colonel spoke of his team there was something of a pang. How she would have liked to be one of such a team !

"My pony team. I mean to drive too. You mustn't think that I am taking a liberty when I say that they are to be called Nina and Ayala."

There was no liberty at all. Had he called her simply Ayala she would have felt it to be no more than pleasant friendship, coming from him. He was so big, and so red, and so ugly, and so friendly ! Why should he not call her Ayala ? But as to that team,—it could not be. "If it's riding," she said demurely, "I can't be one of the ponies."

"It is riding,—of course. Now the Marchesa is not here, we mean to call it hunting in a mild way."

"I can't," she said.

"But you've got to do it, Miss Dormer."

"I haven't got anything to do it with. Of course, I don't mind telling you."

"You are to ride the sweetest little horse that ever was foaled,—just bigger than a pony. It belongs to Sir Harry's sister who is away, and we've settled it all. There never was a safer little beast, and he can climb through a fence without letting you know that it's there."

"But I mean—clothes," said Ayala. Then she whispered, "I haven't got a habit, or anything else anybody ought to have."

"Ah," said the Colonel; "I don't know anything about that. I should say that Nina must have managed that. The horse department was left to me, and I have done my part. You will find that you will have to go out next Tuesday and Friday. The hounds will be here on Tuesday, and they will be at Rufford on Friday. Rufford is only nine miles from here, and it's all settled."

Before the day was over the difficulty had vanished. Miss Albury's horse was not only called into requisition but Miss Albury's habit also. Ayala had a little black hat of her own, which Lady Albury assured her would do excellently well for the hunting field. There was some fitting and some trying on, and perhaps a few moments of preliminary despair; but on the Tuesday morning she rode away from the hall door at eleven o'clock mounted on Sprite, as the little horse was called, and felt herself from head to foot to be one of Colonel Stubbs's team. When at Glenbogie she had ridden a little, and again in Italy, and, being fearless by nature, had no trepidation to impair the fulness of her delight.

Hunting from home coverts rarely exacts much jumping

from ladies. The woods are big, and the gates are numerous. It is when the far-away homes of wild foxes are drawn,—those secluded brakes and gorses where the nobler animal is wont to live at a distance from carriage-roads and other weak refuges of civilization,—that the riding capacities of ladies must be equal to those of their husbands and brothers. This present moment was an occasion for great delight,—at least, so it was found by both Nina and Ayala. But it was not an opportunity for great glory. Till it was time for lunch one fox after another ran about the big woods of Albury in a fashion that seemed perfect to the two girls, but which nearly broke the heart of old Tony, who was still huntsman to the Ufford and Rufford United Hunt. “Darm their nasty ways,” said Tony to Mr. Larry Twentyman, who was one of the popular habitués of the hunt; “they runs one a top of anothers brushes, till there ain’t a ’ound living knows t’other from which. There’s always a many on ’em at Albury, but I never knew an Albury fox worth his grub yet.” But there was galloping along roads and through gates, and long strings of horsemen followed each other up and down the rides, and an easy coming back to the places from which they started, which made the girls think that the whole thing was divine. Once or twice there was a little bank, and once or twice a little ditch,—just sufficient to make Ayala feel that no possible fence would be a difficulty to Sprite. She soon learnt that mode of governing her body which leaping requires, and when she was brought into lunch at about two she was sure that she could

do anything which the art of hunting required. But at lunch an edict went forth as to the two girls, against further hunting for that day. Nina strove to rebel, and Ayala attempted to be eloquent by a supplicating glance at the Colonel. But they were told that as the horses would be wanted again on Friday they had done enough. In truth, Tony had already trotted off with the hounds to Pringle's Gorse, a distance of five miles, and the gentlemen who had lingered over their lunch had to follow him at their best pace. "Pringle's Gorse is not just the place for young ladies," Sir Harry said, and so the matter had been decided against Nina and Ayala.

At about six Sir Harry, Colonel Stubbs, and the other gentlemen returned, declaring that nothing quicker than their run from Pringle's Gorse had ever been known in that country. "About six miles straight on end in forty minutes," said the Colonel, "and then a kill in the open."

"He was laid up under a bank," said young Gosling.

"He was so beat he couldn't carry on a field farther," said Captain Batsby, who was staying in the house.

"I call that the open," said Stubbs.

"I always think I kill a fox in the open," said Sir Harry, "when the hounds run into him, because he cannot run another yard with the country there before him." Then there was a long discussion, as they stood drinking tea before the fire, as to what "the open" meant, from which they went to other hunting matters. To all this Ayala listened with attentive ears, and was aware that she

had spent a great day. Oh, what a difference was there between Stalham and Kingsbury Crescent!

The next two days were almost equally full of delight. She was taken into the stables to see her horse, and as she patted his glossy coat she felt that she loved Sprite with all her heart. Oh, what a world of joy was this;—how infinitely superior even to Queen's Gate and Glenbogie! The gaudy magnificence of the Tringles had been altogether unlike the luxurious comfort of Stalham, where everybody was at his ease, where everybody was good-natured, where everybody seemed to acknowledge that pleasure was the one object of life! On the evening before the Friday she was taken out to dinner by Captain Batsby. She was not sure that she liked Captain Batsby, who made little complimentary speeches to her. But her neighbour on the other side was Colonel Stubbs, and she was quite sure that she liked Colonel Stubbs.

"I know you'll go like a bird to-morrow," said Captain Batsby.

"I shouldn't like that, because there would be no jumping," said Ayala.

"But you'd be such a beautiful bird." The Captain, as he drawled out his words, made an eye at her, and she was sure that she did not like the Captain.

"At what time are we to start to-morrow?" she said, turning to the Colonel.

"Ten, sharp. Mind you're ready. Sir Harry takes us on the drag, and wouldn't wait for Venus, though she wanted five minutes more for her back hair."

"I don't suppose she ever wants any time for her back hair. I wouldn't if I were a goddess."

"Then you'd be a very untidy goddess, that's all. I wonder whether you are untidy."

"Well;—yes;—sometimes."

"I hate untidy girls."

"Thank you, Colonel Stubbs."

"What I like is a nice prim little woman, who never had a pin in the wrong place in her life. Her cuffs and collars are always as stiff as steel, and she never rubs the sleeves of her dresses by leaning about, like some young ladies."

"That's what I do."

"My young woman never sits down lest she should crease her dress. My young woman never lets her ribbons get tangled. My young woman can dress upon £40 a-year, and always look as though she came out of a band-box."

"I don't believe you've got a young woman, Colonel Stubbs."

"Well; no; I haven't,—except in my imagination."

If so, he too must have his Angel of Light! "Do you ever dream about her?"

"Oh dear, yes. I dream that she does scold so awfully when I have her to myself. In my dreams, you know, I'm married to her, and she always wants me to eat hashed mutton. Now, if there is one thing that makes me more sick than another it is hashed mutton. Of course I shall marry her in some of my waking moments, and then I shall have to eat hashed mutton for ever."

Then Captain Batsby put in another word. "I should so like to be allowed to give you a lead to-morrow."

"Oh, thank you,—but I'd rather not have it," said Ayala, who was altogether in the dark, thinking that "a lead" might be some present which she would not wish to accept from Captain Batsby.

"I mean that I should like to show you a line if we get a run."

"What is a line?" asked Ayala.

"A line? Why a line is just a lead;—keep your eye on me and I'll take the fences where you can follow without coming to grief."

"Oh," said Ayala, "that's a lead is it? Colonel Stubbs is going to give my friend and me a lead, as long as we stay here."

"No man ever ought to coach more than one lady at once," said the Captain, showing his erudition. "You're sure to come on top of one another if there are two."

"But Colonel Stubbs is especially told by the Marchesa to look after both of us," said Ayala almost angrily. Then she turned her shoulder to him, and was soon intent upon further instructions from the Colonel.

The following morning was fine, and all the ladies in the house were packed on to the top of Sir Harry's drag. The Colonel sat behind Sir Harry on the plea that he was wanted to take care of the two girls. Captain Batsby and three other gentlemen were put inside, were they consoled themselves with unlimited tobacco. In this way they were driven to a spot called Rufford Cross Roads, where they

found Tony Tappett sitting perfectly quiescent on his old mare, while the hounds were seated around him on the grassy sides of the roads. With him was talking a stout, almost middle-aged gentleman, in a scarlet coat, and natty pink-top boots, who was the owner of all the country around. This was Lord Rufford, who a few years since was known as one of the hardest riders in those parts ; but he had degenerated into matrimony, was now the happy father of half-a-dozen babies, and was hardly ever seen to jump over a fence. But he still came out when the meets were not too distant, and carefully performed that first duty of an English country gentleman,—the preservation of foxes. Though he did not ride much, no one liked a little hunting gossip better than Lord Rufford. It was, however, observed that even in regard to hunting he was apt to quote the authority of his wife.

“ Oh, yes, my Lord,” said Tony, “ there’ll sure to be a fox at Dillsborough. But we’ll find one afore we get to Rufford, my Lord.”

“ Lady Rufford says there hasn’t been a fox seen in the home woods this week.”

“ Her ladyship will be sure to know,” said Tony.

“ Do you remember that fence where poor Major Caneback got his fall six years ago ? ” asked the Lord.

“ Seven years next Christmas, my Lord,” said Tony. “ He never put a leg across a saddle again, poor fellow ! I remember him well, my Lord ; a man who could ’andle a ’orse wonderful, though he didn’t know ’ow to ride to ’ounds ; not according to my idea. To get your animal to

carry you through, never mind 'ow long the thing is; that's my idea of riding to 'ounds, my Lord. The major was for always making a 'orse jump over everything. I never wants 'em to jump over nothing I can't help;—I don't, my Lord."

"That's just what her ladyship is always saying to me," said Lord Rufford, "and I do pretty much what her ladyship tells me."

On this occasion Lady Rufford had been quite right about the home covers. No doubt she generally was right in any assertion she made as to her husband's affairs. After drawing them Tony trotted on towards Dillsborough, running his hounds through a few little springs, which lay near his way. As they went Colonel Stubbs rode between the two girls. "Whenever I see Rufford," said the Colonel, "he does me a world of good."

"What good can a fat man like that do to you?" said Nina.

"He is a continual sermon against marriage. If I could see Rufford once a week I know that I should be safe."

"He seems to me to be a very comfortable old gentleman," said Ayala.

"Old! Seven years ago he was acknowledged to be the one undisputed paragon of a young man in this county. No one else dreamed of looking at a young lady if he chose to turn his eyes in that direction. He was handsome as Apollo ——"

"He an Apollo!" said Nina.

"The best Apollo there then was in these parts, and every one knew that he had forty thousand a-year to spend.

Now he is supposed to be the best hand in the house at rocking the cradle."

"Do you mean to say that he nurses the babies?" asked Ayala.

"He looks as if he did at any rate. He never goes ten miles away from his door without having Lady Rufford with him, and is always tucked up at night just at half-past ten by her ladyship's own maid. Ten years ago he would generally have been found at midnight with cards in his hand and a cigar in his mouth. Now he is allowed two cigarettes a-day. Well, Mr. Twentyman, how are you getting on?" This he said to a good looking better sort of farmer, who came up, riding a remarkably strong horse, and dressed in pink and white cords.

"Thank ye, Colonel, pretty well, considering how hard the times are. A man who owns a few acres and tries to farm them must be on the road to ruin now-a-days. That's what I'm always telling my wife, so that she may know what she has got to expect." Mr. Twentyman had been married just twelve months.

"She isn't much frightened, I daresay," said the Colonel.

"She's young, you see," continued the farmer, "and hasn't settled herself down yet to the sorrows of life." This was that Mr. Lawrence Twentyman who married Kate Masters, the youngest daughter of old Masters, the attorney at Dillsborough, and sister of Mrs. Morton, wife of the squire of Bragton. "By the holy," said Twentyman, suddenly, "the hounds have put a fox out of that little spinney."

CHAPTER XXIV.

RUFFORD CROSS-ROADS.

AYALA, who had been listening attentively to the conversation of Mr. Twentyman, and been feeling that she was being initiated every moment into a new phase of life,—who had been endeavouring to make some connection in her mind between the new charms of the world around her and that world of her dreams that was ever present to her, and had as yet simply determined that neither could Lord Rufford or Mr. Twentyman have ever been an Angel of Light,—at once straightened herself in her saddle, and prepared herself for the doing of something memorable. It was evident to her that Mr. Twentyman considered that the moment for action had come. He did not gallop off wildly, as did four or five others, but stood still for a moment looking intently at a few hounds who, with their tails feathering in the air and with their noses down, seemed at the same time to be irresolute and determined, knowing that the scent was there but not yet quite fixed as to its line. “Half a moment, Colonel,” he said, standing up in his stirrups, with his left hand raised, while his right held his reins and his whip close down on his horse’s neck. “Half a moment!” He only whispered, and then shook his head angrily, as he heard the ill-timed

shouting of one or two men who had already reached the other side of the little skirting of trees. "I wish Fred Botsey's tongue were tied to his teeth," he said, still whispering. "Now, Colonel, they have it. There's a little lane to the right, and a gate. After that the country's open, and there's nothing which the ladies' nags can't do. I know the country so well, you'd perhaps better come with me for a bit."

"He knows all about it," said the Colonel to Ayala. "Do as he tells you."

Ayala and Nina both were quick enough to obey. Twentyman dashed along the lane, while the girls followed him with the Colonel after them. When they were at the hunting-gate already spoken of, old Tony Tappett was with them, trotting, impatient to get to the hounds, courteously giving place to the ladies,—whom, however, in his heart, he wished at home in bed,—and then thrusting himself through the gate in front of the Colonel. "D—— their pig-headed folly," he said, as he came up to his friend Twentyman—"they knows no more about it than if they'd just come from be'ind a counter,—'olloaing, 'olloaing, 'olloaing,—as if 'olloaing 'd make a fox break! 'Owsomever 'e's off now, and they've got Cranbury Brook between them and his line!" This he said in a squeaking little voice, intended to be jocose and satirical, shaking his head as he rode. This last idea seemed to give him great consolation.

It was the consideration, deep and well-founded, as to the Cranbury which had induced Larry Twentyman to

pause on the road when he had paused, and then to make for the lane and the gate. The direction had hardly seemed to be that of the hounds, but Larry knew the spinney, knew the brook,—knew the fox, perhaps,—and was aware of the spot at which the brute would cross the water if he did cross it. The brute did cross the water, and therefore there was Cranbury Brook between many of the forward riders and his line.

Sir Harry was then with them, and two or three other farmers. But Larry had a léad, and the two girls were with him. Tony Tappett, though he had got up to his hounds, did not endeavour to ride straight to them as did Larry Twentyman. He was old and unambitious, very anxious to know where his hounds were, so that he might be with them should they want the assistance of his voice and counsel, anxious to be near enough to take their fox from them should they run into him, but taking no glory in jumping over a fence if he could avoid it, creeping about here and there, knowing from experience nearly every turn in the animal's mind, aware of every impediment which would delay him, riding fast only when the impediments were far between, taking no amusement to himself out of the riding, but with his heart cruelly, bloodily, ruthlessly set upon killing the animal before him. To kill his fox he would imperil his neck, but for the glory of riding he would not soil his boots if he could help it. After the girls came the Colonel, somewhat shorn of his honour in that he was no longer giving them a lead, but doing his best to maintain the pace, which Twentyman was

making very good. "Now, young ladies," said Twentyman, "give them their heads, and let them do it just as they please,—alongside of each other, and not too near to me." It was a brook,—a confluent of Cranbury Brook, and was wide enough to require a good deal of jumping. It may be supposed that the two young ladies did not understand much of the instructions given to them. To hold their breath and be brave was the only idea present to them. The rest must come from instinct and chance. The other side of the brook was heaven;—this would be purgatory. Larry, fearing perhaps that the order as to their not being too near might not be obeyed, added a little to his own pace so as to be clear of them. Nevertheless they were only a few strides behind, and had Larry's horse missed his footing there would have been a mess. As it was they took the brook side by side close to each other, and landed full of delight and glory on the opposite bank. "Bravo! young ladies," shouted Twentyman.

"Oh, Nina, that is divine," said Ayala. Nina was a little too much out of breath for answering, but simply threw up her eyes to Heaven and made a flourish with her whip, intended to be expressive of her perfect joy.

Away went Larry and away went the girls with him, quite unconscious that the Colonel's horse had balked the brook and then jumped into it,—quite unconscious that Sir Harry, seeing the Colonel's catastrophe, had followed Tony a quarter of a mile up the brook to a ford. Even in the soft bosoms of young ladies "the devil take the hindmost" will be the motto most appropriate for hunting. Larry

Twentyman, of whom they had never heard before, was now the god of their idolatry. Where Larry Twentyman might go it was manifestly their duty to follow, even though they should never see the poor Colonel again. They recked nothing of the fox or of the hounds or of the master or even of the huntsman. They had a man before them to show them the way, and as long as they could keep him in sight each was determined to be at any rate as good as the other. To give Larry his due it must be acknowledged that he was thoroughly thoughtful of them. At every fence encountered he studied the spot at which they would be least likely to fall. He had to remember, also, that there were two of them together, and that he had made himself in a way responsible for the safety of both. All this he did, and did well, because he knew his business. With the exception of the water-jump, the country over which they passed was not difficult. For a time there was a run of gates, each of which their guide was able to open for them, and as they came near to Dillsborough Wood there were gaps in most of the fences; but it seemed to the girls that they had galloped over monstrous hedges and leapt over walls which it would almost take a strong man to climb. The brook, however,—the river as it seemed to them,—had been the crowning glory. Ayala was sure that that brook would never be forgotten by her. Even the Angel of Light was hardly more heavenly than the brook.

That the fox was running for Dillsborough Wood was a fact well known both to Tony Tappett and Mr. Larry Twentyman. A fox crossing the brook from the Rufford

side would be sure to run to Dillsborough Wood. When Larry, with the two girls, were just about to enter the ride, there was old Tony standing up on his horse at the corner, looking into the covert. And now also a crowd of horsemen came rushing up, who had made their way along the road, and had passed up to the wood through Mr. Twentyman's farm-yard;—for, as it happened, here it was that Mr. Twentyman lived and farmed his own land. Then came Sir Harry, Colonel Stubbs, and some others who had followed the line throughout,—the Colonel with his boots full of water, as he had been forced to get off his horse in the bed of the brook. Sir Harry, himself, was not in the best of humours,—as will sometimes be the case with masters when they fail to see the cream of a run. “I never saw such riding in my life,” said Sir Harry, as though some great sin had been committed by those to whom he was addressing himself. Larry turned round, and winked at the two girls, knowing that, if sin had been committed, they three were the sinners. The girls understood nothing about it, but still thought that Larry Twentyman was divine.

While they were standing about on the rides, Tony was still at his work. The riding was over, but the fox had to be killed, and Dillsborough Wood was a covert in which a fox will often require a large amount of killing. No happier home for the vulpine deity exists among the shires of England! There are earths there deep, capacious, full of nurseries; but these, on the present occasion, were barred from the poor stranger by the wicked ingenuity of

man. But there were deep dells, in which the brambles and bracken were so thick that no hound careful of his snout would penetrate them. The undergrowth of the wood was so interwoven that no huntsman could see through its depths. There were dark nooks so impervious that any fox ignorant of the theory of his own scent must have wondered why a hound should have been induced to creep into spaces so narrow. From one side to another of the wood the hunted brute would traverse, and always seem to have at last succeeded in putting his persecutors at fault. So it was on this occasion. The run, while it lasted, had occupied, perhaps, three-quarters of an hour, and during a time equally long poor old Tony was to be seen scurrying from one side of the wood to another, and was to be heard loudly swearing at his attendant whips because the hounds did not follow his footsteps as quickly as his soul desired.

"I never mean to put on a pair of top-boots again, as long as I live," said the Colonel. At this time a little knot of horsemen was stationed in a knoll in the centre of the wood, waiting till they should hear the fatal whoop. Among them were Nina, Ayala, the Colonel, Larry Twentyman, and Captain Batsby.

"Give up top-boots?" said Larry. "You don't mean to say you'll ride in black!"

"Top-boots, black boots, spurs, breeches, and red coat, I renounce them all from this moment. If ever I'm seen in a hunting field again it will be in a pair of trousers with overalls."

"Now, you're joking, Colonel," said Larry.

"Why won't you wear a red coat any more?" said Ayala.

"Because I'm disgraced for ever. I came out to coach two young women, and give them a lead, and all I've done was to tumble into a brook, while a better man has taken my charge away from me."

"Oh, Jonathan, I am so sorry," said Nina, "particularly about your getting into the water."

"Oh, Colonel Stubbs, we ought to have stopped," said Ayala.

"It was my only comfort to see how very little I was wanted," said the Colonel. "If I had broke my neck instead of wetting my feet it would have been just the same to some people."

"Oh, Jonathan!" said Nina, really shocked.

"We ought to have stopped. I know we ought to have stopped," said Ayala, almost crying.

"Nobody ever stops for any one out hunting," said Twentyman, laying down a great law.

"I should think not," said Captain Batsby, who had hardly been off the road all the time.

"I am sure the Colonel will not be angry with me because I took the young ladies on," said Larry.

"The Colonel is such a muff," said the Colonel himself, "that he will never presume to be angry with anybody again. But if my cousin and Miss Dormer are not very much obliged to you for what you have done for them there will be nothing of gratitude left in the female British bosom. You have probably given to them the most triumphant moment of their existence."

"It was their own riding, Colonel; I had nothing to do with it."

"I am so much obliged to you, Sir," said Nina.

"And so am I," said Ayala, "though it was such a pity that Colonel Stubbs got into the water."

At that moment came the long expected call. Tony Tappett had killed his fox, after crossing and re-crossing through the wood half a score of times. "Is it all over?" asked Ayala, as they hurried down the knoll and scurried down the line to get to the spot outside the wood to which Tony was dragging the carcass of his defeated enemy.

"It's all over for him," said Larry. "A good fox he was, but he'll never run again. He is one of them bred at Littlecotes. The foxes bred at Littlecotes always run."

"And is he dead?" asked Nina. "Poor fellow! I wish it wasn't necessary to kill them." Then they stood by till they saw the body of the victim thrown up into the air, and fall amongst the blood-smirched upturned noses of the expectant pack.

"I call that a pretty little run, Sir Harry," said Larry Twentyman.

"Pretty well," said Sir Harry; "the pace wasn't very great, or that pony of mine which Miss Dormer is riding could not have lived with it."

"Horses, Sir Harry, don't want so much pace, if they are allowed to go straight. It's when a man doesn't get well away, or has made a mess with his fences, that he needs an extra allowance of pace to catch the hounds. If you're once with them and can go straight you may keep

your place without such a deal of legs." To this Sir Harry replied only by a grunt, as on the present occasion he had "made a mess with his fences," as Larry Twentyman had called it.

"And now, young ladies," said Larry, "I hope you'll come in and see my missus and her baby, and have a little bit of lunch, such as it is."

Nina asked anxiously whether there would not be another fox. Ayala also was anxious lest in accepting the proffered hospitality she should lose any of the delights of the day. But it was at length arranged that a quarter of an hour should be allowed before Tony took his hounds over to the Bragton coverts. Immediately Larry was off his horse, rushing into the house and ordering everyone about it to come forth with bread and cheese and sherry and beer. In spite of what he had said of his ruin it was known that Larry Twentyman was a warm man, and that no man in Rufford gave what he had to give with a fuller heart. His house was in the middle of the Rufford and Ufford hunting country, and the consumption there during the hunting months of bread and cheese, sherry and beer, must have been immense. Everyone seemed to be intimate with him, and all called for what they wanted as if they were on their own premises. On such occasions as these Larry was a proud man; for no one in those parts carried a lighter heart or was more fond of popularity.

The parlour inside was by no means big enough to hold the crowding guests, who therefore munched their bread and cheese and drank their beer round the front door,

without dismounting from their horses; but Nina and Ayala with their friend the Colonel were taken inside to see Mrs. Twentyman and her baby. "Now, Larry, what sort of a run was it?" said the young mother. "Where did you find him, and what line did he take?"

"I'll tell you all about it when I come back; there are two youngladies for you now to look after." Then he introduced his wife, and the baby which was in her arms. "The little fellow is only six weeks old, and yet she wanted to come to the meet. She'd have been riding to hounds if I'd let her."

"Why not?" said Mrs. Twentyman. At any rate I might have gone in the pony carriage and had baby with me."

"Only six weeks old!" said Nina, stooping down and kissing the child.

"He is a darling!" said Ayala. "I hope he'll go out hunting some day."

"He'll want to go six times a week if he's anything like his father," said Mrs. Twentyman.

"And seven times if he's like his mother," said Larry. Then again they mounted their nags, and trotted off across the high roads to the Bragton coverts. Mrs. Twentyman with her baby in her arms walked down to the gate at the high road and watched them with longing eyes, till Tony and the hounds were out of sight.

Nothing further in the way of hunting was done that day which requires to be recorded. They drew various coverts and found a fox or two, but the scent, which had

been so strong in the morning, seemed to have gone, and the glory of the day was over. The two girls and the Colonel remained companions during the afternoon, and succeeded in making themselves merry over the incident of the brook. The Colonel was in truth well pleased that Larry Twentyman should have taken his place, though he probably would not have been gratified had he seen Captain Batsby assume his duties. It had been his delight to see the two girls ride, and he had been near enough to see them. He was one of those men who, though fond of hunting, take no special glory in it, and are devoid of the jealousy of riding. Not to have a good place in a run was no worse to him than to lose a game of billiards or a rubber of whist. Let the reader understand that this trait in his character is not mentioned with approbation. "Always to excel and to go ahead of everybody" should, the present writer thinks, be in the heart of every man who rides to hounds. There was in our Colonel a philosophical way of looking into the thing which perhaps became him as a man, but was deleterious to his character as a sportsman.

"I do so hope you've enjoyed yourself, Ayala!" he said, as he lifted her from her horse.

"Indeed,—indeed, I have!" said Ayala, not noticing the use of her Christian name. "I have been so happy, and I am so much obliged to you!"

CHAPTER XXV.

“YOU ARE NOT HE.”

AYALA had been a week at Stalham, and according to the understanding which had existed she should now have returned to Kingsbury Crescent. She had come for a week, and she had had her week. Oh, what a week it had been, so thoroughly happy, without a cloud, filled full with ecstatic pleasures! Jonathan Stubbs had become to her the pleasantest of friends. Lady Albury had covered her with caresses and little presents. Nina was the most perfect of friends. Sir Harry had never been cross, except for that one moment in the wood. And as for Sprite,—Sprite had nearly realised her idea of an Angel of Light. Oh, how happy she had been! She was to return on the Monday, having thus comprised two Sundays within her elongated week. She knew that her heaven was to be at an end; but she was grateful, and was determined in her gratitude to be happy and cheerful to the close. But early on this Sunday morning Colonel Stubbs spoke a word to Lady Albury. “That little girl is so thoroughly happy here. Cannot you prolong it for her just for another three days?”

“Is it to be for her,—or for Colonel Stubbs, who is enamoured of the little girl?” asked Lady Albury.

"For both," said the Colonel, rather gravely.

"Are you in earnest?"

"What do you call earnest? I do love to see a pretty creature enjoy herself thoroughly as she does. If you will make her stay till Thursday Albury will let her ride the little horse again at Star Cross on Wednesday."

"Of course she shall stay,—all the season if you wish it. She is indeed a happy girl if you are in earnest."

Then it was settled, and Lady Albury in her happiest manner informed Ayala that she was not to be allowed to take her departure till after she had ridden Sprite once again. "Sir Harry says that you have given the little horse quite a name, and that you must finish off his character for him at Star Cross." As was the heart of the Peri when the gate of Paradise was opened for her so was the heart of Ayala. There were to be four days, with the fourth as a hunting-day, before she need think of going! There was an eternity of bliss before her.

"But Aunt Margaret!" she said, not, however, doubting for a moment that she would stay. Who cares for a frowning aunt at the distance of an eternity. I fear that in the ecstasy of her joy she had forgotten the promise made, that she would always remember her aunt's goodness to her. "I will write a note to Mrs. Dosett, and make it all straight," said Lady Albury. The note was written, and, whether matters were straight or crooked at Kingsbury Crescent, Ayala remained at Albury.

Colonel Stubbs had thought about the matter, and determined that he was quite in earnest. He had, he told him-

self, enough for modest living,—for modest living without poverty. More would come to him when old General Stubbs, his uncle, should die. The general was already past seventy. What was the use of independence if he could not allow himself to have the girl whom he really loved? Had any human being so perfectly lovely as Ayala ever flashed before his eyes before? Was there ever a sweeter voice heard from a woman's mouth? And then all her little ways and motions,—her very tricks,—how full of charm they were! When she would open her eyes and nod her head, and pout with her lips, he would declare to himself that he could no longer live without her. And then every word that fell from her lips seemed to have something in it of pretty humour. In fact the Colonel was in love, and had now resolved that he would give way to his love in spite of his aunt, the Marchesa, and in spite of his own philosophy.

He felt by no means sure of success, but yet he thought that he might succeed. From the moment in which, as the reader may remember, he had accosted her at the ball, and desired her to dance with him in obedience to his aunt's behests, it had been understood by everyone around him that Ayala had liked him. They had become fast friends. Ayala allowed him to do many little things which, by some feminine instinct of her own, would have been put altogether beyond the reach of Captain Batsby. The Colonel knew all this, and knew at the same time that he should not trust to it only. But still he could not but trust to it in some degree. Lady Albury had told him

that Ayala would be a happy girl if he were in earnest, and he himself was well aware of Ayala's dependent position, and of the discomforts of Kingsbury Crescent. Ayala had spoken quite openly to him of Kingsbury Crescent as to a confidential friend. But on all that he did not lean much as being in his favour. He could understand that such a girl as Ayala would not accept a husband merely with the object of avoiding domestic poverty. Little qualms of doubt came upon him as he remembered the nature of the girl, so that he confessed to himself that Lady Albury knew nothing about it. But, nevertheless, he hoped. His red hair and his ugly face had never yet stood against him among the women with whom he had lived. He had been taught by popularity to think himself a popular man;—and then Ayala had shown so many signs of her friendship!

There was shooting on Saturday, and he went out with the shooters, saying nothing to any one of an intended early return; but at three o'clock he was back at the house. Then he found that Ayala was out in the carriage, and he waited. He sat in the library pretending to read, till he heard the sounds of the carriage-wheels, and then he met the ladies in the hall. "Are they all home from shooting?" asked Lady Albury. The Colonel explained that no one was home but himself. He had missed three cock-pheasants running, and had then come away in disgust. "I am the most ignominious creature in existence," he said, laughing; "one day I tumble into a ditch three feet wide——"

"It was ten yards at least," said Nina, jealous as to the glory of her jump.

"And to-day I cannot hit a bird. I shall take to writing a book and leave the severer pursuit of sport to more enterprising persons." Then suddenly turning round he said to Ayala, "Are you good-natured enough to come and take a walk with me in the shrubbery?"

Ayala, taken somewhat by surprise at the request, looked up into Lady Albury's face. "Go with him, my dear, if you are not tired," said Lady Albury. "He deserves consolation after all his good deeds to you." Ayala still doubted. Though she was on terms of pleasant friendship with the man, yet she felt almost awestruck at this sudden request that she should walk alone with him. But not to do so, especially after Lady Albury's injunction, would have been peculiar. She certainly was not tired, and had such a walk come naturally it would have been an additional pleasure to her; but now, though she went she hesitated, and showed her hesitation.

"Are you afraid to come with me?" he said, as soon as they were out on the gravel together.

"Afraid! Oh, dear no, I should not be afraid to go anywhere with you, I think; only it seemed odd that you did not ask Nina too."

"Shall I tell you why?"

"Why was it?"

"Because I have something to say to you which I do not want Nina to hear just at this moment. And then I thought that we were such friends that you would not mind coming with me."

"Of course we are," said Ayala.

"I don't know why it should be so, but I seem to have known you years instead of days."

"Perhaps that is because you knew papa."

"More likely because I have learnt to know your papa's daughter."

"Do you mean Lucy?"

"I mean Ayala."

"That is saying the same thing twice over. You know me because you know me."

"Just that. How long do you suppose I have known that Mrs. Gregory, who sat opposite to us yesterday?"

"How can I tell?"

"Just fifteen years. I was going to Harrow when she came as a young girl to stay with my mother. Her people and my people had known each other for the last fifty years. Since that I have seen her constantly, and of course we are very intimate."

"I suppose so."

"I know as much about her after all that as if we had lived in two different hemispheres and couldn't speak a word of each other's language. There isn't a thought or a feeling in common between us. I ask after her husband and her children, and then tell her it's going to rain. She says something about the old General's health, and then there is an end of everything between us. When next we meet we do it all over again."

"How very uninteresting!" said Ayala.

"Very uninteresting. It is because there are so many Mrs. Gregorys about that I like to go down to Drumcarrer

and live by myself. Perhaps you're a Mrs. Gregory to somebody."

"Why should I be a Mrs. Gregory? I don't think I am at all like Mrs. Gregory."

"Not to me, Ayala." Now she heard the "Ayala," and felt something of what it meant. There had been moments at which she had almost disliked to hear him call her Miss Dormer; but now,—now she wished that he had not called her Ayala. She strove to assume a serious expression of face, but having done so she could not dare to turn it up towards him. The glance of her little anger, if there was any, fell only upon the ground. "It is because you are to me a creature so essentially different from Mrs. Gregory that I seem to know you so well. I never want to go to Drumcaller if you are near me;—or, if I think of Drumcaller, it is that I might be there with you."

"I am sure the place is very pretty, but I don't suppose I shall ever see it."

"Do you know about your sister and Mr. Hamel?"

"Yes," said Ayala, surprised. "She has told me all about it. How do you know?"

"He was staying at Drumcaller,—he and I together with no one else,—when he went over to ask her. I never saw a man so happy as when he came back from Glenbogie. He had got all that he wanted in the world."

"I do so love him because he loves her."

"And I love her,—because she loves you."

"It is not the same, you know," said Ayala, trying to think it all out.

"May I not love her?"

"He is to be my brother. That's why I love him. She can't be your sister." The poor girl, though she had tried to think it all out, had not thought very far.

"Can she not?" he said.

"Of course not. Lucy is to marry Mr. Hamel."

"And whom am I to marry?" Then she saw it all. "Ayala,—Ayala,—who is to be my wife?"

"I do not know," she said,—speaking with a gruff voice, but still in a whisper, with a manner altogether different,—thinking how well it would be that she should be taken at once back into the house.

"Do you not know whom I would fain have as my wife?" Then he felt that it behoved him to speak out plainly. He was already sure that she would not at once tell him that it should be as he would have it,—that she would not instantly throw herself into his arms. But he must speak plainly to her, and then fight his cause as best he might. "Ayala, I have asked you to come out with me that I might ask you to be my wife. It is that that I did not wish Nina to hear at once. If you will put out your hand and say that it shall be so, Nina and all the world shall know it. I shall be as proud then as Hamel, and as happy,—happier, I think. It seems to me that no one can love as I do now, Ayala; it has grown upon me from hour to hour as I have seen you. When I first took you away to that dance it was so already. Do you remember that night at the theatre,—when I had come away from everything and striven so hard that I might be near

to you before you went back to your home? Ayala, I loved you then so dearly;—but not as I love you now. When I saw you riding away from me yesterday, when I could not get over the brook, I told myself that unless I might catch you at last, and have you all to myself, I could never again be happy. Do you remember when you stooped down and kissed that man's baby at the farmhouse? Oh, Ayala, I thought then that if you would not be my wife,—if you would not be my wife,—I should never have wife, never should have baby, never should have home of my own." She walked on by his side, listening, but she had not a word to say to him. It had been easy enough to her to reject and to rebuke and to scorn Tom Tringle, when he had persisted in his suit; but she knew not with what words to reject this man who stood so high in her estimation, who was in many respects so perfect, whom she so thoroughly liked,—but whom, nevertheless, she must reject. He was not the Angel of Light,—could never be the Angel of Light. There was nothing there of the azure wings upon which should soar the all but celestial being to whom she could condescend to give herself and her love. He was pleasant, good, friendly, kind-hearted,—all that a friend or a brother should be; but he was not the Angel of Light. She was sure of that. She told herself that she was quite sure of it, as she walked beside him in silence along the path. "You know what I mean, Ayala, when I tell you that I love you," he continued. But still she made no answer. "I have seen at last the one human being with whom I feel that I can be

happy to spend my life, and, having seen her, I ask her to be my wife. The hope has been dwelling with me and growing since I first met you. Shall it be a vain hope? Ayala, may I still hope?"

"No," she said, abruptly.

"Is that all?"

"It is all that I can say."

"Is that one 'no' to be the end of everything between us?"

"I don't know what else I ought to say to you, Colonel Stubbs."

"Do you mean that you can never love me?"

"Never," she said.

"That is a hard word,—and hardly friendly. Is there to be no more than one hard word between you and me? Though I did not venture to think that you could tell me that you loved me, I looked for something kinder, something gentler than that."

"From such a sharp and waspish word as 'no,'

"To pluck the sting!"

Ayala did not know the lines I have quoted, but the idea conveyed in them was present clearly to her mind. She would fain have told him, had she known how to do so, that her heart was very gentle towards him, was very kind, gentle and kind as a sister's;—but that she could not love him, so as to become his wife. "You are not he,—not he, not that Angel of Light, which must come to me, radiant with poetry, beautiful to the eye, full of all excel-

lences of art, lifted above the earth by the qualities of his mind,—such a one as must come to me if it be that I am ever to confess that I love. You are not he, and I cannot love you. But you shall be the next to him in my estimation, and you are already so dear to me that I would be tender to you, would be gentle,—if only I knew how." It was all there, clear enough in her mind, but she had not the words. "I don't know what it is that I ought to say," she exclaimed through her sobs.

"The truth, at any rate," he answered, sternly, "but not the truth, half and half, after the fashion of some young ladies. Do not think that you should palter with the truth either because it may not be palatable to me, or seem decorous to yourself. To my happiness this matter is all important, and you are something to my happiness, if only because I have risked it on your love. Tell me;—why cannot you love me?"

The altered tone of his voice, which now had in it something of severity, seemed to give her more power.

"It is because ——" Then she paused.

"Because why? Out with it, whatever it is. If it be something that a man may remedy I will remedy it. Do not fear to hurt me. Is it because I am ugly? That I cannot remedy." She did not dare to tell him that it was so, but she looked up at him, not dissenting by any motion of her head. "Then God help me, for ugly I must remain."

"It is not that only."

"Is it because my name is Stubbs—Jonathan Stubbs?"

Now she did assent, nodding her head at him. He had bade her tell him the truth, and she was so anxious to do as he bade her! "If it be so, Ayala, I must tell you that you are wrong,—wrong and foolish; that you are carried away by a feeling of romance, which is a false romance. Far be it from me to say that I could make you happy, but I am sure that your happiness cannot be made and cannot be marred by such accidents as that. Do you think that my means are not sufficient?"

"No ;—no," she cried ; "I know nothing of your means. If I could love you I would not condescend to ask,—even to hear."

"There is no other man, I think?"

"There is no other man."

"But your imagination has depicted to you something grander than I am,"—then she assented quickly, turning round and nodding her head to him,—"*some one who shall better respond to that spirit of poetry which is within you?*" Again she nodded her head approvingly, as though to assure him that now he knew the whole truth. "Then, Ayala, I must strive to soar till I can approach your dreams. But, if you dare to desire things which are really grand, do not allow yourself to be mean at the same time. Do not let the sound of a name move you, or I shall not believe in your aspirations. Now shall I take you back to the house?"

Back to the house they went, and there was not another word spoken between them. By those last words of his she had felt herself to be rebuked. If it were possible that he

could ask her again whether that sound, Jonathan Stubbs, had anything to do with it, she would let him know now, by some signal, that she no longer found a barrier in the name. But there were other barriers,—barriers which he himself had not pretended to call vain. As to his ugliness, that he had confessed he could not remedy; calling on God to pity him because he was so. And as for that something grander which he had described, and for which her soul sighed, he had simply said that he would seek for it. She was sure that he would not find it. It was not to such as he that the something grander,—which was to be the peculiar attribute of the Angel of Light,—could be accorded. But he had owned that the something grander might exist.

CHAPTER XXVI.

“THE FINEST HERO THAT I EVER KNEW.”

THE Colonel and Ayala returned to the house without a word. When they were passing through the hall she turned to go at once up the stairs to her own room. As she did so he put out his hand to her, and she took it. But she passed on without speaking, and when she was alone she considered it over all in her own mind. There could be no doubt that she was right. Of that she was quite sure. It was certainly a fixed law that a girl should not marry a man unless she loved him. She did not love this man, and therefore she ought not to marry him. But there were some qualms at her heart as to the possible reality of the image which she had created for her own idolatry. And she had been wounded when he told her that she should not allow herself to be mean amidst her soarings. She had been wounded, and yet she knew that he had been right. He had intended to teach her the same lesson when he told her the absurd story of the woman who had been flung out of the window. She could not love him ; but that name of [his should never again be a reason for not doing so. Let the Angel of Light come to her with his necessary angelic qualities, and no want of euphony in a sound should be a barrier to him. Nor in

truth could any outside appearance be an attribute of angelic light. The Angel of Light might be there even with red hair. Something as to the truth of this also came across her, though the Colonel had not rebuked her on that head.

But how should she carry herself now during the four days which remained to her at Stalham Park? All the loveliness seemed to depart from her prospect. She would hardly know how to open her mouth before her late friend. She suspected that Lady Albury knew with what purpose the Colonel had taken her out into the shrubbery, and she would not dare to look Lady Albury in the face. How should she answer Nina if Nina were to ask her questions about the walk. The hunt for next Wednesday was no longer a delight to which she could look forward. How would it be possible that Colonel Stubbs should direct her now as to her riding, and instruct her as to her conduct in the hunting-field? It would be better for her that she should return at once to Kingsbury Crescent.

As she thought of this there did come upon her a reflection that had she been able to accept Colonel Stubbs's offer there would have been an end for ever to the miseries of her aunt's house. She would have been lifted at once into the mode of life in which the man lived. Instead of being a stranger admitted by special grace into such an Elysium as that of Stalham Park, she would become one of those to whom such an Elysium belonged almost of right. By her own gifts she would have won her way into that upper and brighter life which seemed to her to be all smiles and all joy. As to his income she thought nothing

and cared nothing. He lived with men who had horses and carriages, and who spent their time in pleasurable pursuits. And she would live amidst ladies who were always arrayed in bright garments, who, too, had horses and carriages at their command, and were never troubled by those sordid cares which made life at Kingsbury Crescent so sad and tedious. One little word would have done it all for her, would have enabled her to take the step by which she would be placed among the bright ones of the earth.

But the remembrance of all this only made her firmer in her resolution. If there was any law of right and wrong fixed absolutely in her bosom, it was this,—that no question of happiness or unhappiness, of suffering or joy, would affect her duty to the Angel of Light. She owed herself to him should he come to seek her. She owed herself to him no less, even should he fail to come. And she owed herself equally whether he should be rich or poor. As she was fortifying herself with these assurances, Nina came to ask her whether she would not come down to tea. Ayala pleaded headache, and said that she would rest till dinner. “Has anything happened?” asked Nina. Ayala simply begged that she might be asked no questions then, because her head was aching. “If you do not tell me everything, I shall think you are no true friend,” said Nina, as she left the room.

As evening drew on she dressed for dinner, and went down into the drawing-room. In doing so it was necessary to pass through the billiard-room, and there she found

Colonel Stubbs, knocking about the balls. "Are you dressed for dinner?" he exclaimed; "I haven't begun to think of it yet, and Sir Harry hates a man when he comes in late. That wretch Batsby has beaten me four games." With that he rushed off, putting down the cue with a rattle, and seeming to Ayala to have recovered altogether from the late prostration of his spirits.

In the drawing-room Ayala was for a few minutes alone, and then, as she was glad to see, three or four ladies all came in at once, so that no question could be asked her by Lady Albury. They went into dinner without the Colonel, who was in truth late, and she was taken in by Mr. Gosling, whose pretty little wife was just opposite to her. On the other side of her sat Lord Rufford, who had come to Stalham with his wife for a day or two, and who immediately began to congratulate her on the performance of the day before. "I am told you jumped the Cranbury Brook," he said. "I should as soon think of jumping the Serpentine."

"I did it because somebody told me."

"Ah," said Lord Rufford, with a sigh, "there is nothing like ignorance, innocence, and youth combined. But why didn't Colonel Stubbs get over after you?"

"Because Colonel Stubbs couldn't," said that gentleman, as he took his seat in the vacant chair.

"It may be possible," said Sir Harry, "that a gentleman should not be able to jump over Cranbury Brook; but any gentleman, if he will take a little trouble, may come down in time for dinner."

“Now that I have been duly snubbed right and left,” said the Colonel, “perhaps I may eat my soup.”

Ayala, who had expected she hardly knew what further troubles, and who had almost feared that nobody would speak to her because she had misbehaved herself, endeavoured to take heart of grace when she found that all around her, including the Colonel himself, were as pleasant as ever. She had fancied that Lady Albury had looked at her specially when Colonel Stubbs took his seat, and she had specially noticed the fact that his chair had not been next her own. These little matters she was aware Lady Albury managed herself, and was aware also that in accordance with the due rotation of things she and the Colonel should have been placed together. She was glad that it was not so, but at the same time she was confident that Lady Albury knew something of what had passed between herself and her suitor. The evening, however, went off easily, and nothing occurred to disturb her except that the Colonel had called her by her Christian name, when as usual he brought to her a cup of tea in the drawing-room. Oh, that he would continue to do so, and yet not demand from her more than their old friendship!

The next morning was Sunday, and they all went to church. It was a law at Stalham that everyone should go to church on Sunday morning. Sir Harry himself, who was not supposed to be a peculiarly religious man, was always angry when any male guest did not show himself in the enormous family pew. “I call it d—— indecent,” he has been heard to say. But nobody was expected to go

twice,—and consequently nobody ever did go twice. Lunch was protracted later than usual. The men would roam about the grounds with cigars in their mouths, and ladies would take to reading in their own rooms, in following which occupation they would spend a considerable part of the afternoon asleep. On this afternoon Lady Albury did not go to sleep, but contrived to get Ayala alone upstairs into her little sitting-room. "Ayala," she said, with something between a smile and a frown, "I am afraid I am going to be angry with you."

"Please don't be angry, Lady Albury."

"If I am right in what I surmise, you had an offer made to you yesterday which ought to satisfy the heart of almost any girl in England." Here she paused, but Ayala had not a word to say for herself. "If it was so, the best man I know asked you to share his fortune with him."

"Has he told you?"

"But he did?"

"I shall not tell," said Ayala, proudly.

"I know he did. I knew that it was his intention before. Are you aware what kind of man is my cousin, Jonathan Stubbs? Has it occurred to you that in truth and gallantry, in honour, honesty, courage, and real tenderness, he is so perfect as to be quite unlike to the crowd of men you see?"

"I do know that he is good," said Ayala.

"Good! Where will you find any one good like him? Compare him to the other men around him, and then say whether he is good! Can it be possible that you should refuse the love of such a man as that?"

"I don't think I ought to be made to talk about it," said Ayala, hesitating.

"My dear, it is for your own sake and for his. When you go away from here it may be so difficult for him to see you again."

"I don't suppose he will ever want," said Ayala.

"It is sufficient that he wants it now. What better can you expect for yourself?"

"I expect nothing," said Ayala, proudly. "I have got nothing, and I expect nothing."

"He will give you everything, simply because he loves you. My dear, I should not take the trouble to tell you all this, did I not know that he is a man who ought to be accepted when he asks such a request as that. Your happiness would be safe in his hands." She paused, but Ayala had not a word to say. "And he is not a man likely to renew such a request. He is too proud for that. I can conceive no possible reason for such a refusal unless it be that you are engaged. If there be some one else, then of course there must be an end of it."

"There is no one else."

"Then, my dear, with your prospects it is sheer folly. When the General dies he will have over two thousand a year."

"As if that had anything to do with it!" said Ayala, holding herself aloft in her wrath, and throwing angry glances at the lady.

"It is what I call romance," said Lady Albury. "Romance can never make you happy."

"At any rate it is not riches. What you call romance may be what I like best. At any rate if I do not love Colonel Stubbs I am sure I ought not to marry him;—and I won't."

After this there was nothing further to be said. Ayala thought that she would be turned out of the room,—almost out of the house, in disgrace. But Lady Albury, who was simply playing her part, was not in the least angry. "Well, my dear," she said, "pray,—pray, think better of it. I am in earnest, of course, because of my cousin,—because he seems to have put his heart upon it. He is just the man to be absolutely in love when he is in love. But I would not speak as I do unless I were sure that he would make you happy. My cousin Jonathan is to me the finest hero that I know. When a man is a hero he shouldn't be broken-hearted for want of a woman's smiles,—should he?"

"She ought not to smile unless she loves him," said Ayala, as she left the room.

The Monday and Tuesday went very quietly. Lady Albury said nothing more on the great subject, and the Colonel behaved himself exactly as though there had been no word of love at all. There was nothing special said about the Wednesday's hunt through the two days, till Ayala almost thought that there would be no hunt for her. Nor, indeed, did she much wish for it. It had been the Colonel who had instigated her to deeds of daring, and under his sanction that she had ventured to ride. She would hardly know how to go through the Wednesday,—

whether still to trust him, or whether to hold herself aloof from him. When nothing was said on the subject till late on the evening of the Tuesday, she had almost resolved that she would not put on her habit when the morning came. But just as she was about to leave the drawing-room with her bed-candle Colonel Stubbs came to her. "Most of us ride to the meet to-morrow," he said ; "but you and Nina shall be taken in the waggonette so as to save you a little. It is all arranged." She bowed and thanked him, going to bed almost sorry that it should have been so settled. When the morning came Nina could not ride. She had hurt her foot, and, coming early into Ayala's room, declared with tears that she could not go. "Then neither shall I," said Ayala, who was at that moment preparing to put on her habit.

"But you must. It is all settled, and Sir Harry would be offended if you did not go. What has Jonathan done that you should refuse to ride with him because I am lame?"

"Nothing," said Ayala.

"Oh, Ayala, do tell me. I should tell you everything. Of course you must hunt whatever it is. Even though he should have offered and you refused him, of course you must go."

"Must I?" said Ayala.

"Then you have refused him?"

"I have. Oh, Nina, pray do not speak of it. Do not think of it if you can help it. Why should everything be disturbed because I have been a fool?"

"Then you think you have been a fool?"

"Other people think so; but if so I shall at any rate be constant to my folly. What I mean is, that it has been done, and should be passed over as done with. I am quite sure that I ought not to be scolded; but Lady Albury did scold me." Then they went down together to breakfast, Ayala having prepared herself properly for the hunting-field.

In the waggonette there were with her Lady Albury, Mrs. Gosling, and Nina, who was not prevented by her lameness from going to the meet. The gentlemen all rode, so that there was no immediate difficulty as to Colonel Stubbs. But when she had been put on her horse by his assistance and found herself compelled to ride away from the carriage, apparently under his especial guidance, her heart misgave her, and she thoroughly wished that she was at home in the Crescent. Though she was specially under his guidance there were at first others close around her, and, while they were on the road going to the covert which they were to draw, conversation was kept up so that it was not necessary for her to speak;—but what should she do when she should find herself alone with him as would certainly soon be the case? It soon was the case. The hounds were at work in a large wood in which she was told they might possibly pass the best part of the day, and it was not long before the men had dispersed themselves, some on this side some on that, and she found herself with no one near her but the Colonel. "Ayala," he said, "of course you know that it is my duty to look after you, and to do it better if I can than I did on Friday."

"I understand," she said.

"Do not let any remembrance of that walk on Saturday interfere with your happiness to-day. Who knows when you may be out hunting again?"

"Never!" she said; "I don't suppose I shall ever hunt again."

"Carpe diem," he said, laughing. "Do you know what 'carpe diem' means?"

"It is Latin perhaps."

"Yes; and therefore you are not supposed to understand it. This is what it means. As an hour for joy has come, do not let any trouble interfere with it. Let it all be, for this day at least, as though there had been no walk in the Stalham Woods. There is Larry Twentyman. If I break down as I did on Friday you may always trust to him. Larry and you are old friends now."

"Carpe diem," she said to herself. "Oh, yes; if it were only possible. How is one to 'carpe diem' with one's heart full of troubles?" And it was the less possible because this man whom she had rejected was so anxious to do everything for her happiness. Lady Albury had told her that he was a hero,—that he was perfect in honour, honesty, and gallantry; and she felt inclined to own that Lady Albury was almost right. Yet,—yet how far was he from that image of manly perfection which her daily thoughts had created for her! Could she have found an appropriate word with which to thank him she would have done so; but there was no such word, and Larry Twentyman was now with them, taking off his hat and overflow-

ing with compliments. "Oh, Miss Dormer, I am so delighted to see you out again."

"How is the baby, Mr. Twentyman?"

"Brisk as a bee, and hungry as a hunter."

"And how is Mrs. Twentyman?"

"Brisker and hungrier than the baby. What do you think of the day, Colonel?"

"A very good sort of day, Twentyman, if we were anywhere out of these big woods." Larry shook his head solemnly. The Mudcombe Woods in which they were now at work had been known to occupy Tony Tappett and his whole pack from eleven o'clock till the dusk of evening. "We've got to draw them, of course," continued the Colonel. Then Mr. Twentyman discoursed at some length on the excellence of Mudcombe Woods. What would any county be without a nursery for young foxes? Gorse-coverts, hedge-rows, and little spinneys would be of no avail unless there were some grandly wild domain in which maternal and paternal foxes could roam in comparative security. All this was just as Ayala would have it, because it enabled her to ask questions, and saved her from subjects which might be painful to her.

The day, in truth, was not propitious to hunting even. Foxes were found in plenty, and two of them were killed within the recesses of the wood; but on no occasion did they run a mile into the open. For Ayala it was very well, because she was galloping hither and thither, and because before the day was over she found herself able to talk to

the Colonel in her wonted manner; but there was no great glory for her as had been the glory of Little Cranbury Brook.

On the next morning she was taken back to London and handed over to her aunt in Kingsbury Crescent without another word having been spoken by Colonel Stubbs in reference to his love.

CHAPTER XXVII.

LADY ALBURY'S LETTER.

"I HAVE had a letter from Lady Albury," said Aunt Margaret, almost as soon as Ayala had taken off her hat and cloak.

"Yes, I know, Aunt Margaret. She wrote to ask that I might stay for four more days. I hope it was not wrong."

"I have had another letter since that, on Monday, about it; I have determined to show it you. There it is. You had better read it by yourself, and I will come to you again in half an hour." Then, very solemnly, but with no trace of ill-humour, Mrs. Dosett left the room. There was something in her tone and gait so exceedingly solemn that Ayala was almost frightened. Of course, the letter must be about Colonel Stubbs, and, of course, the writer of it would find fault with her. She was conscious that she was adding one to her terribly long list of sins in not consenting to marry Colonel Stubbs. It was her misfortune that all her friends found fault with everything that she did. Among them there was not one, not even Nina, who fully sympathised with her. Not even to Lucy could she expatiate with a certainty of sympathy in regard to the Angel of Light. And now, though her aunt was apparently not

angry,—only solemn,—she felt already sure that she was to be told that it was her duty to marry Colonel Stubbs. It was only the other day that her aunt was preaching to her as to the propriety of marrying her cousin Tom. It seemed, she said to herself, that people thought that a girl was bound to marry any man who could provide a house for her, and bread to eat, and clothes to wear. All this passed through her mind as she slowly drew Lady Albury's letter from the envelope and prepared to read it. The letter was as follows:—

“Albury, Monday, 18th November, 18—.

“DEAR MADAM,

“Your niece will return to you, as you request, on Thursday, but before she reaches you I think it my duty to inform you of a little circumstance which has occurred here. My cousin, Colonel Jonathan Stubbs, who is also the nephew of the Marchesa Baldoni, has made Miss Dormer an offer. I am bound to add that I did not think it improbable that it would be so, when I called on your husband, and begged him to allow your niece to come to us. I did not then know my cousin's intention as a fact. I doubt whether he knew it himself; but from what I had heard I thought it probable, and, as I conceive that any young lady would be fortunate in becoming my cousin's wife, I had no scruple.

“He has proposed to her, and she has rejected him. He has set his heart upon the matter, and I am most anxious that he should succeed, because I know him to be a man who will not easily brook disappointment where he has set

his heart. Of all men I know he is the most steadfast in his purpose.

“I took the liberty of speaking to your niece on the subject, and am disposed to think that she is deferred by some feeling of foolish romance, partly because she does not like the name, partly because my cousin is not a handsome man in a girl’s eyes;—more probably, however, she has built up to herself some poetic fiction, and dreams of she knows not what. If it be so, it is a pity that she should lose an opportunity of settling herself well and happily in life. She gave as a reason that she did not love him. My experience is not so long as yours, perhaps, but such as I have has taught me to think that a wife will love her husband when she finds herself used well at all points. Mercenary marriages are, of course, bad; but it is a pity, I think, that a girl, such as your niece, should lose the chance of so much happiness by a freak of romance.

“Colonel Stubbs, who is only twenty-eight years of age, has a staff appointment at Aldershot. He has private means of his own, on which alone he would be justified in marrying. On the death of his uncle, General Stubbs, he will inherit a considerable accession of fortune. He is not, of course, a rich man; but he has ample for the wants of a family. In all other good gifts, temper, manliness, truth, and tenderness, I know no one to excel him. I should trust any young friend of my own into his hands with perfect safety.

“I have thought it right to tell you this. You will use your own judgment in saying what you think fit to your

niece. Should she be made to understand that her own immediate friends approve of the offer, she would probably be induced to accept it. I have not heard my cousin say what may be his future plans. I think it possible that, as he is quite in earnest, he will not take one repulse. Should he ask again, I hope that your niece may receive him with altered views.

“ Pray believe me to be, my dear Madam,

“ Yours sincerely,

“ ROSALINE ALBURY.”

Ayala read the letter twice over before her aunt returned to her, and, as she read it, felt something of a feeling of renewed kindness come upon her in reference to the writer of it ;—not that she was in the least changed in her own resolution, but that she liked Lady Albury for wishing to change her. The reasons given, however, were altogether impotent with her. Colonel Stubbs had the means of keeping a wife ! If that were a reason then also ought she to marry her cousin, Tom Tringle. Colonel Stubbs was good and true ; but so also very probably was Tom Tringle. She would not compare the two men. She knew that her cousin Tom was altogether distasteful to her, while she took delight in the companionship of the Colonel. But the reasons for marrying one were to her thinking as strong as for marrying the other. There could be only one valid excuse for marriage,—that of adoring the man ;—and she was quite sure that she did not adore Colonel Jonathan Stubbs. Lady Albury had said in her letter, that a girl

would be sure to love a man who treated her well after marriage; but that would not suffice for her. Were she to marry at all, it would be necessary that she should love the man before her marriage.

"Have you read the letter, my dear?" said Mrs. Dosett, as she entered the room and closed the door carefully behind her. She spoke almost in a whisper, and seemed to be altogether changed by the magnitude of the occasion.

"Yes, Aunt Margaret, I have read it."

"I suppose it is true?"

"True! It is true in part."

"You did meet this Colonel Stubbs?"

"Oh, yes; I met him."

"And you had met him before?"

"Yes, Aunt Margaret. He used to come to Brook Street. He is the Marchesa's nephew."

"Did he ——" This question Aunt Margaret asked in a very low whisper, and her most solemn voice. "Did he make love to you in Brook Street?"

"No," said Ayala, sharply.

"Not at all?"

"Not at all. I never thought of such a thing. I never dreamed of such a thing when he began talking to me out in the woods at Stalham on Saturday."

"Had you been—been on friendly terms with him?"

"Very friendly terms. We were quite friends, and used to talk about all manner of things. I was very fond of him, and never afraid of anything that he said to me. He was Nina's cousin and seemed almost to be my cousin too."

"Then you do like him?"

"Of course I do. Everybody must like him. But that is no reason why I should want to marry him."

Upon this Mrs. Dosett sat silent for awhile turning the great matter over in her thoughts. It was quite clear to her that every word which Ayala had spoken was true; and probable also that Lady Albury's words were true. In her inmost thoughts she regarded Ayala as a fool. Here was a girl who had not a shilling of her own, who was simply a burden on relatives whom she did not especially love, who was doomed to a life which was essentially distasteful to her,—for all this in respect to herself and her house Mrs. Dosett had sense enough to acknowledge,—who seemed devoted to the society of rich and gay people, and yet would not take the opportunities that were offered her of escaping what she disliked and going to that which she loved! Two offers had now been made to her, both of them thoroughly eligible, to neither of which would objection have been made by any of the persons concerned. Sir Thomas had shown himself to be absolutely anxious for the success of his son. And now it seemed that the grand relations of this Colonel Stubbs were in favour of the match. What it was in Ayala that entitled her to such promotion Mrs. Dosett did not quite perceive. To her eyes her niece was a fantastic girl, pretty indeed, but not endowed with that regular tranquil beauty which she thought to be of all feminine graces the most attractive. Why Tom Tringle should have been so deeply smitten with Ayala had been a marvel to her; and now this story

of Colonel Stubbs was a greater marvel. "Ayala," she said, "you ought to think better of it."

"Think better of what, Aunt Margaret?"

"You have seen what this Lady Albury says about her cousin, Colonel Stubbs."

"What has that to do with it?"

"You believe what she says? If so why should you not accept him?"

"Because I can't," said Ayala.

"Have you any idea what is to become of your future life?" said Mrs. Dosett, very gravely.

"Not in the least," said Ayala. But that was a fib, because she had an idea that in the fullness of time it would be her heavenly fate to put her hand into that of the Angel of Light.

"Gentlemen won't come running after you always, my dear."

This was almost as bad as being told by her Aunt Emeline that she had encouraged her cousin Tom. "It's a great shame to say that. I don't want anybody to run after me. I never did."

"No, my dear; no. I don't think that you ever did." Mrs. Dosett, who was justice itself, did acknowledge to herself that of any such fault as that suggested, Ayala was innocent. Her fault was quite in the other direction, and consisted of an unwillingness to settle herself and to free her relations of the burden of maintaining her when proper opportunities arose for doing so. "I only want to explain to you that people must,—must,—must make their hay while the sun shines. You are young now."

"I am not one-and-twenty yet," said Ayala, proudly.

"One-and-twenty is a very good time for a girl to marry,—that is to say if a proper sort of gentleman asks her."

"I don't think I ought to be scolded because they don't seem to me to be the proper sort. I don't want anybody to come. Nobody ought to be talked to about it at all. If I cared about any one that you or Uncle Reginald did not approve, then you might talk to me. But I don't think that anything ought to be said about anybody unless I like him myself." So the conversation was over, and Mrs. Dossett felt that she had been entirely vanquished.

Lady Albury's letter was shown to Mr. Dossett, but he refused to say a word to his niece on the subject. In the argument which followed between him and his wife he took his niece's part, opposing altogether that idea that hay should be made while the sun shines. "It simply means selling herself," said Mr. Dossett.

"That is nonsense, Reginald. Of course such a girl as Ayala has to do the best she can with her good looks. What else has she to depend upon?"

"My brother-in-law will do something for her."

"I hope he will,—though I do not think that a very safe reed to depend upon as she has twice offended him. But of course a girl thinks of marrying. Ayala would be very much disgusted if she were told that she was to be an old maid, and live upon £100 a year supplied by Sir Thomas's bounty. It might have been that she would have to do it;—but now that chances are open she ought to take them. She should choose between her cousin Tom and this Colonel

Stubbs; and you should tell her that, if she will not, you will no longer be responsible for her."

To this Mr. Dosett turned altogether a deaf ear. He was quite sure that his responsibility must be continued till Ayala should marry, or till he should die, and he would not make a threat which he would certainly be unable to carry out. He would be very glad if Ayala could bring herself to marry either of the young men. It was a pity that she should feel herself compelled to refuse offers so excellent. But it was a matter for her own judgment, and one in which he would not interfere. For two days this almost led to a coldness between the man and his wife, during which the sufferings of poor Mrs. Dosett were heartrending.

Not many days after Ayala's return her sister Lucy came to see her. Certain reasons had caused Lady Tringle to stay at Glenbogie longer than usual, and the family was now passing through London on their way to Merle Park. Perhaps it was the fact that the Trafficks had been effectually extruded from Glenbogie, but would doubtless turn up at Merle Park, should Lady Tringle take up her residence there before the autumn was over. That they should spend their Christmas at Merle Park was an acknowledged thing; —to mamma Tringle an acknowledged benefit, because she liked to have her daughter with her; to papa Tringle an acknowledged evil, because he could not endure to be made to give more than he intended to give. That they should remain there afterwards through January, and till the meeting of Parliament, was to be expected. But it was

hoped that they might be driven to find some home for themselves if they were left homeless by Sir Thomas for awhile. The little plan was hardly successful, as Mr. Traffick had put his wife into lodgings at Hastings, ready to pounce down on Merle Park as soon as Lady Tringle should have occupied the house a few days. Lady Tringle was now going there with the rest of the family, Sir Thomas having been in town for the last six weeks.

Lucy took advantage of the day which they passed in London, and succeeded in getting across to the Crescent. At this time she had heard nothing of Colonel Stubbs, and was full indeed of her own troubles.

"You haven't seen him?" she said to her sister.

"Seen who?" asked Ayala, who had two "hims" to her bow,—and thought at the moment rather of her own two "hims" than of Lucy's one.

"Isadore. He said that he would call here." Ayala explained that she had not seen him, having been absent from town during the last ten days,—during which Mr. Hamel had in fact called at the house. "Ayala," continued Lucy, "what am I to do?"

"Stick to him," said Ayala, firmly.

"Of course I shall. But Aunt Emmeline thinks that I ought to give him up or——"

"Or what?"

"Or go away," said Lucy, very gravely.

"Where would you go to?"

"Oh, where indeed? Of course he would have me, but it would be ruin to him to marry a wife without a penny

when he earns only enough for his own wants. His father has quarrelled with him altogether. He says that nobody can prevent our being married if we please, and that he is quite ready to make a home for me instantly; but I know that last year he hardly earned more than two hundred pounds after paying all his expenses, and were I to take him at his word I should ruin him."

"Would Uncle Tom turn you out?"

"He has been away almost ever since Mr. Hamel came to Glenbogie, and I do not know what he will say. Aunt Emmeline declares that I can only stay with them just as though I were her daughter, and that a daughter would be bound to obey her."

"Does Gertrude obey her about Mr. Houston?"

"Gertrude has her own way with her mother altogether. And of course a daughter cannot really be turned out. If she tells me to go I suppose I must go."

"I should ask Uncle Tom," said Ayala. "She could not make you go out into the street. When she had to get rid of me, she could send me here in exchange; but she can't say now that you don't suit, and have me back again."

"Oh, Ayala, it is so miserable. I feel that I do not know what to do with myself."

"Nor do I," said Ayala, jumping up from the bed on which she was sitting. "It does seem to be so cross-grained. Nobody will let you marry, and everybody will make me."

"Do they still trouble you about Tom?"

"It is not Tom now, Lucy. Another man has come up."

"As a lover?"

"Oh, yes; quite so. His name is,—such a name, Lucy,—his name is Colonel Jonathan Stubbs."

"That is Isadore's friend,—the man who lives at Drum-caller."

"Exactly. He told me that Mr. Hamel was at Drum-caller with him. And now he wants me to be his wife."

"Do you not like him?"

"That is the worst part of it all, Lucy. If I did not like him I should not mind it half so much. It is just because I like him so very much that I am so very unhappy. His hair is just the colour of Aunt Emmeline's big shawl."

"What does that signify?"

"And his mouth stretches almost from ear to ear."

"I shouldn't care a bit for his mouth."

"I don't think I do much, because he does look so good-natured when he laughs. Indeed he is always the most good-natured man that ever lived."

"Has he got an income enough for marriage?" asked Lucy, whose sorrows were already springing from that most fertile source of sorrowing.

"Plenty they tell me,—though I do not in the least know what plenty means."

"Then Ayala why should you not have him?"

"Because I can't," said Ayala. "How is a girl to love a man if she does not love him. Liking has nothing to

do with it. You don't think liking ought to have anything to do with it?"

This question had not been answered when Aunt Margaret came into the room, declaring that the Tringle man-servant, who had walked across the park with Miss Dormer, was waxing impatient. The sisters, therefore, were separated, and Lucy returned to Queen's Gate.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

MISS DOCIMER.

"I TELL you fairly that I think you altogether wrong;—that it is cowardly, unmanly, and disgraceful. I don't mean, you see, to put what you call a fine point upon it."

"No, you don't."

"It is one of those matters on which a person must speak the truth or not speak at all. I should not have spoken unless you forced it upon me. You don't care for her in the least."

"That's true. I do not know that I am especially quick at what you call caring for young ladies. If I care for anybody it is for you."

"I suppose so; but that may as well be dropped for the present. You mean to marry this girl simply because she has got a lot of money?"

"Exactly that;—as you before long will marry some gentleman only because he has got money."

"You have no right to say so because I am engaged to no man. But if I were so it is quite different. Unless I marry I can be nobody. I can have no existence that I can call my own. I have no other way of pushing myself into the world's notice. You are a man."

"You mean to say that I could become a merchant or a

lawyer,—be a Lord Chancellor in time, or perhaps an Archbishop of Canterbury.”

“You can live and eat and drink and go where you wish without being dependent on any one. If I had your freedom and your means do you think that I would marry for money?”

In this dialogue the main part was taken by Mr. Frank Houston, whose ambition it was to marry Miss Gertrude Tringle, and the lady's part by his cousin and intimate friend, Miss Imogene Docimer. The scene was a walk through a pine-forest on the southern slopes of the Tyrolean Alps, and the occasion had been made a little more exhilarating than usual by the fact that Imogene had been strongly advised both by her brother, Mr. Mudbury Docimer, and by her sister-in law, Mrs. Mudbury Docimer, not to take any more distant rambles with her far-away cousin Frank Houston. In the teeth of that advice this walk was taken, and the conversation in the pine-wood had at the present moment arrived at the point above given.

“I do not know that any two persons were ever further asunder in an argument than you and I in this,” said Frank, not in the least disconcerted by the severe epithets which had been applied to him. “I conceive that you are led away by a desire to deceive yourself, whereas hypocrisy should only be used with the object of deceiving others.”

“How do I deceive myself?”

“In making believe that men are generally different from what they are;—in trying to suppose that I ought to be, if I am not, a hero. You shall not find a man whose

main object is not that of securing an income. The clergyman who preaches against gold licks the ground beneath the minister's feet in order that he may become a bishop. The barrister cares not with what case he may foul his hands so long as he may become rich. The man in trade is so aware of his own daily dishonesty that he makes two separate existences for himself, and endeavours to atone for his rascality in the City by his performance of all duties at the West End. I regard myself to be so infinitely cleaner in my conscience than other men that I could not bring myself to be a bishop, an attorney-general, or a great merchant. Of all the ways open to me this seems to me to be the least sordid. I give her the only two things which she desires,—myself and a position. She will give me the only thing I desire, which is some money. When you marry you'll make an equally fine bargain,—only your wares will be your beauty."

"You will not give her yourself;—not your heart."

"Yes, I shall. I shall make the most of her, and shall do so by becoming as fond of her as I can. Of course I like breeding. Of course I like beauty. Of course I like that aroma of feminine charm which can only be produced by a mixture of intellect, loveliness, taste, and early association. I don't pretend to say that my future would not be much sweeter before me with you as my wife,—if only either of us had a sufficiency of income. I acknowledge that. But then I acknowledge also that I prefer Miss Tringle, with £100,000, to you with nothing; and I do not think that I ought to be called unmanly, disgraceful,

and a coward, because I have courage enough to speak the truth openly to a friend whom I trust. My theory of life shocks you, not because it is uncommon, but because it is not commonly declared."

They were silent for a while as they went on through the path, and then Miss Docimer spoke to him in an altered voice. "I must ask you not to speak to me again as one who by any possibility could have been your wife."

"Very well. You will not wish me to abandon the privilege of thinking of past possibilities?"

"I would,—if it were possible."

"Quite impossible! One's thoughts, I imagine, are always supposed to be one's own."

"You know what I mean. A gentleman will always spare a woman if he can do so; and there are cases, such as have been ours, in which it is a most imperative duty to do so. You should not have followed us when you had made up your mind about this young lady."

"I took care to let you know, beforehand, that I intended it."

"You should not have thrown the weight upon me. You should not even have written to me."

"I wonder what you would have said then,—how loudly you would have abused me,—had I not written! Would you not have told me then that I had not the courage to be open with you?" He paused for an answer, but she made none. "But I do recognise the necessity of my becoming subject to abuse in this state of affairs. I have been in no respect false, nor in any way wanting in affec-

tion. When I suggested to you that £600 a-year between us, with an increasing family, and lodgings in Marylebone, would be uncomfortable, you shuddered at the prospect. When I explained to you that you would have the worst of it because my club would be open to me, you were almost angry with me because I seemed to imply that there could be any other than one decision."

"There could only be one decision,—unless you were man enough to earn your bread."

"But I wasn't. But I ain't. You might as well let that accident pass, sans dire. Was there ever a moment in which you thought that I should earn my bread?"

"Never for a moment did I endow you with the power of doing anything so manly."

"Then why throw it in my teeth now? That is not fair. However, I do own that I have to be abused. I don't see any way in which you and I are to part without it. But you need not descend to Billingsgate."

"I have not descended to Billingsgate, Mr. Houston."

"Upper-world Billingsgate! Cowardice, as an accusation from a woman to a man, is upper-world Billingsgate. But it doesn't matter. Of course I know what it means. Do you think your brother wants me to go away at once?"

"At once," she said.

"That would be disagreeable and absurd. You mean to sit to me for that head?"

"Certainly not."

"I cannot in the least understand why not. What has a question of art to do with marriage or giving in marriage?"

And why should Mrs. Docimer be so angry with me, when she has known the truth all along?"

"There are questions which it is of no avail to answer. I have come out with you now because I thought it well that we should have a final opportunity of understanding each other. You understand me at any rate."

"Perfectly," he said. "You have taken especial care on this occasion to make yourself intelligible."

"So I intended. And as you do understand me, and know how far I am from approving your philosophy, you can hardly wish to remain with us longer." Then they walked on together in absolute silence for above a mile. They had come out of the wood, and were descending, by a steep and narrow path, to the village in which stood the hotel at which the party was staying. Another ten minutes would take them down to the high road. The path here ran by the side of a rivulet, the course of which was so steep that the waters made their way down in a succession of little cataracts. From the other side of the path was a fence, so close to it, that on this particular spot there was room only for one to walk. Here Frank Houston stepped in front of his companion, so as to stop her. "Imogene," he said, "if it is intended that I am to start by the diligence for Innsbruck this evening, you had better bid me farewell at once."

"I have bidden you farewell," she said.

"Then you have done it in so bitter a mood that you had better try your hand at it again. Heaven only knows in what manner you or I may meet again."

"What does it matter?" she asked.

"I have always felt that the hearts of men are softer than the hearts of women. A woman's hand is soft, but she can steel her heart when she thinks it necessary, as no man can do. Does it occur to you at this moment that there has been some true affection between you and me in former days?"

"I wish it did not."

"It may be so that I wish it also; but there is the fact. No wishing will enable me to get rid of it. No wishing will save me from the memory of early dreams and sweet longings and vain triumphs. There is the remembrance of bright glory made very sad to me by the meanness of the existing truth. I do not say but that I would obliterate it if I could; but it is not to be obliterated; the past will not be made more pleasant to me by any pretence of present indignation. I should have thought that it would have been the same with you."

"There has been no glory," she said, "though I quite acknowledge the meanness."

"There has been at any rate some love."

"Misplaced. You had better let me pass on. I have, as you say, steeled myself. I will not condescend to any tenderness. In my brother's presence and my sister's I will wish you good-bye and express a hope that you may be successful in your enterprises. Here, by the brook-side, out upon the mountain-path, where there is no one to hear us but our two selves, I will bid you no farewell softer than that already spoken. Go and do as you propose. You

have my leave. When it shall have been done there shall never be a word spoken by me against it. But, when you ask me whether you are right, I will only say that I think you to be wrong. It may be that you owe nothing to me; but you owe something to her, and something also to yourself. Now, Mr. Houston, I shall be glad to pass on."

He shrugged his shoulders and then stepped out of the path, thinking as he did so how ignorant he had been, after all that had passed, of much of the character of Imogene Docimer. It could not be, he had thought, but that she would melt into softness at last. "I will not condescend to any tenderness," she had said, and it seemed that she would be as good as her word. He then walked down before her in silence, and in silence they reached the inn.

"Mr. Houston," said Mrs. Docimer, before they sat down to dinner together, "I thought it was understood that you and Imogene should not go out alone together again."

"I have taken my place to Innspruck by the diligence this evening," he answered.

"Perhaps it will be better so, though both Mudbury and I will be sorry to lose your company."

"Yes, Mrs. Docimer, I have taken my place. Your sister seemed to think that there would be great danger if I waited till to-morrow morning when I could have got a pleasant lift in a return carriage. I hate travelling at night and I hate diligences. I was quite prepared to post all the way, though it would have ruined me,—only for this accursed diligence."

"I am sorry you should be inconvenienced."

"It does not signify. What a man without a wife may suffer in that way never does signify. It's just fourteen hours. You wouldn't like Docimer to come with me."

"That's nonsense. You needn't go the whole way unless you like. You could sleep at Brunecken."

"Brunecken is only twelve miles, and it might be dangerous."

"Of course you choose to turn everything into ridicule."

"Better that than tears, Mrs. Docimer. What's the good of crying? I can't make myself an elder son. I can't endow Imogene with a hundred thousand pounds. She told me just now that I might earn my bread, but she knows that I can't. It's very sad. But what can be got by being melancholy?"

"At any rate you had better be away from her."

"I am going,—this evening. Shall I walk on, half a stage, at once, without any dinner? I wish you had heard the kind of things she said to me. You would not have thought that I had gone to walk with her for my own pleasure."

"Have you not deserved them?"

"I think not;—but nevertheless I bore them. A woman, of course, can say what she pleases. There's Docimer,—I hope he won't call me a coward."

Mr. Docimer came out on the terrace, on which the two were standing, looking as sour as death. "He is going by the diligence to Innspruck this afternoon," said Mrs. Docimer.

"Why did he come? A man with a grain of feeling would have remained away."

"Now, Docimer," said Frank, "pray do not make yourself unpleasant. Your sister has been abusing me all the morning like a pickpocket, and your wife looks at me as though she would say just as much if she dared. After all, what is it I have done that you think so wicked?"

"What will everybody think at home," said Mrs. Docimer, "when they know that you're with us again? What chance is she to have if you follow her about in this way?"

"I shall not follow her very long," said Frank. "My wings will soon be cut, and then I shall never fly again." They were at this time walking up and down the terrace together, and it seemed for awhile that neither of them had another word to say in the matter of the dispute between them. Then Houston went on again in his own defence. "Of course it is all bad," he said. "Of course we have all been fools. You knew it, and allowed it; and have no right to say a word to me."

"We thought that when your uncle died there would have been money," said Docimer, with a subdued growl.

"Exactly; and so did I. You do not mean to say that I deceived either you or her?"

"There should have been an end of it when that hope was over."

"Of course there should. There should never have been a dream that she or I could marry on six hundred a year. Had not all of us been fools, we should have taken our hats off and bade each other farewell for ever when the state of the

old man's affairs was known. We were fools; but we were fools together; and none of us have a right to abuse the others. When I became acquainted with this young lady at Rome, it had been settled among us that Imogene and I must seek our fortunes apart."

"Then why did you come after her?" again asked Mr. Docimer.

At this moment Imogene herself joined them on the terrace. "Mary," she said to her sister-in-law, "I hope you are not carrying on this battle with Mr. Houston. I have said what there was to be said."

"You should have held your tongue and said nothing," growled her brother.

"Be that as it may I have said it, and he quite understands what I think about it. Let us eat our dinner in peace and quietness, and then let him go on his travels. He has the world free before him, which he no doubt will open like an oyster, though he does not carry a sword." Soon after this they did dine, and contented themselves with abusing the meat and the wine, and finding fault with Tyrolese cookery, just as though they had no deeper cares near their hearts. Precisely at six the heavy diligence stopped before the hotel door, and Houston, who was then smoking with Docimer on the terrace, got up to bid them adieu. Mrs. Docimer was kind and almost affectionate, with a tear in her eye. "Well, old fellow," said Docimer, "take care of yourself. Perhaps everything will turn up right some of these days." "Good-bye, Mr. Houston," said Imogene, just giving him her hand to touch in the lightest manner possible. "God bless you, Imogene," said

he. And there was a tear also in his eye. But there was none in hers, as she stood looking at him while he prepared himself for his departure; nor did she say another word to him as he went. "And now," said she, when the three of them were left upon the terrace, "I will ask a great favour of you both. I will beg you not to let there be another word about Mr. Houston among us." After that she rambled out by herself, and was not seen again by either of them that evening.

When she was alone she too shed her tears, though she felt impatient and vexed with herself as they came into her eyes. It was not perhaps only for her lost love that she wept. Had no one known that her love had been given and then lost she might have borne it without weeping. But now, in carrying on this vain affair of hers, in devoting herself to a lover who had, with her own consent, passed away from her, she had spent the sweet fresh years of her youth, and all those who knew her would know that it had been so. He had told her that it would be her fate to purchase for herself a husband with her beauty. It might be so. At any rate she did not doubt her own beauty. But, if it were to be so, then the romance and the charm of her life were gone. She had quite agreed that six hundred a year, and lodgings in Marylebone, would be quite unendurable; but what was there left for her that would be endurable? He could be happy with the prospect of Gertrude Tringle's money. She could not be happy, looking forward to that unloved husband who was to be purchased by her beauty.

CHAPTER XXIX.

AT MERLE PARK. NO. 1.

SIR THOMAS took the real holiday of the year at Glenbogie,—where he was too far removed from Lombard Street to be drawn daily into the vortex of his millions. He would stay usually six weeks at Glenbogie,—which were by no means the happiest weeks of the year. Of all the grand things of the world which his energy and industry had produced for him, he loved his millions the best. It was not because they were his,—as indeed they were not. A considerable filing off them,—what he regarded as his percentage,—annually became his own; but it was not this that he loved. In describing a man's character it is the author's duty to give the man his due. Sir Thomas liked his own wealth well enough. Where is the rich man who does not?—or where is the poor man who does not wish that he had it to like? But what he loved were the millions with which Travers and Treason dealt. He was Travers and Treason, though his name did not even appear in the firm, and he dealt with the millions. He could affect the rate of money throughout Europe, and emissaries from national treasuries would listen to his words. He had been Governor and Deputy-Governor of the Bank of England. All the City respected him, not so much because he was rich, as

that he was one who thoroughly understood millions. If Russia required to borrow some infinite number of roubles, he knew how to arrange it, and could tell to a rouble at what rate money could be made by it, and at what rate money would certainly be lost. He liked his millions, and was therefore never quite comfortable at Glenbogie. But at Merle Park he was within easy reach of London. At Merle Park he was not obliged to live, from week's end to week's end, without a sight of Lombard Street. The family might be at Merle Park, while he might come down on a Friday and remain till Tuesday morning. That was the plan proposed for Merle Park. As a fact he would spend four days in town, and only two down in the country. Therefore, though he spent his so-named holiday at Glenbogie, Merle Park was the residence which he loved.

In this autumn he went up to London long before his family, and then found them at Merle Park on the Saturday after their arrival there. They had gone down on the previous Wednesday. On the Saturday, when he entered the house, the first thing he saw was Mr. Traffick's hat in the hall. This was Saturday, 23rd November, and there would be three months before Parliament would meet! A curse was not muttered, but just formed between his teeth, as he saw the hat. Sir Thomas, in his angriest mood, never went so far as quite to mutter his curses. Will one have to expiate the anathemas which are well kept within the barrier of the teeth, or only those which have achieved some amount of utterance? Sir Thomas went on, with a servant at his heels, chucking about the doors rather vio-

lently, till he found Mr. Traffick alone in the drawing-room. Mr. Traffick had had a glass of sherry and bitters brought in for his refreshment, and Sir Thomas saw the glass on the mantelpiece. He never took sherry and bitters himself. One glass of wine, with his two o'clock mutton chop, sufficed him till dinner. It was all very well to be a Member of Parliament, but, after all, Members of Parliament never do anything. Men who work don't take sherry and bitters! Men who work don't put their hats in other people's halls without leave from the master of the house! "Where's your mistress?" said Sir Thomas, to the man, without taking any notice of his son-in-law. The ladies had only just come in from driving, were very cold, and had gone up to dress. Sir Thomas went out of the room, again banging the door, and again taking no notice of Mr. Traffick. Mr. Traffick put his hand up to the mantelpiece, and finished his sherry and bitters.

"My dear," said Mr. Traffick to his wife, up in her bedroom, "your father has come down in one of his tantrums."

"I knew he would," said Augusta.

"But it does not signify the least. Give him a kiss when you see him, and don't seem to notice it. There is not a man in the world has a higher regard for me than your father, but if any one were to see him in one of his tantrums they would suppose he meant to be uncivil."

"I hope he won't be downright unkind, Septimus," said his wife.

"Never fear! The kindest-hearted man in the world is your father."

"So he's here!" That was the first word of greeting which Sir Thomas addressed to his wife in her bed-room.

"Yes, Tom;—they're here."

"When did they come?"

"Well;—to tell the truth, we found them here."

"The —— !" But Sir Thomas restrained the word on the right, or inside, of the teeth.

"They thought we were to be here a day sooner, and so they came on the Wednesday morning. They were to come, you know."

"I wish I knew when they were to go."

"You don't want to turn your own daughter out of your own house?"

"Why doesn't he get a house of his own for her? For her sake why doesn't he do it? He has the spending of £6,000 a year of my money, and yet I am to keep him! No;—I don't want to turn my daughter out of my house; but it'll end in my turning him out."

When a week had passed by Mr. Traffick had not been as yet turned out. Sir Thomas, when he came back to Merle Park on the following Friday, condescended to speak to his son-in-law, and to say something to him as to the news of the day; but this he did in an evident spirit of preconceived hostility. "Everything is down again," he said.

"Fluctuations are always common at this time of the year," said Traffick; "but I observe that trade always becomes brisk a little before Christmas."

"To a man with a fixed income, like you, it doesn't much matter," said Sir Thomas.

"I was looking at it in a public light."

"Exactly. A man who has an income, and never spends it, need not trouble himself with private views as to the money market." Mr. Traffick rubbed his hands, and asked whether the new buildings at the back of the Lombard Street premises were nearly finished.

Mr. Traffick's economy had a deleterious effect upon Gertrude, which she, poor girl, did not deserve. Sir Thomas, deeply resolving in his mind that he would, at some not very distant date, find means by which he would rid himself of Mr. Traffick, declared to himself that he would not, at any rate, burden himself with another son-in-law of the same kind. Frank Houston was, to his thinking, of the same kind, and therefore he hardened his heart against Frank Houston. Now Frank Houston, could he have got his wife with £6,000 a year,—as Mr. Traffick had done,—would certainly not have troubled the Tringle mansions with too much of his presence. It would have been his object to remove himself as far as possible from the Tringles, and to have enjoyed his life luxuriously with the proceeds of his wife's fortune. But his hopes in this respect were unjustly impeded by Mr. Traffick's parsimony. Soon after leaving the hotel in the Tyrol at which we lately saw him, Frank Houston wrote to his lady-love, declaring the impatience of his ardour, and suggesting that it would be convenient if everything could be settled before Christmas. In his letter he declared to Gertrude how very uncomfortable it was to him to have to discuss money matters with her father. It was so disagreeable that he did not think that he could bring himself to do it again. But, if she would

only be urgent with her father, she would of course prevail. Acting upon this Gertrude determined to be urgent with her father on his second coming to Merle Park, when, as has been explained, Sir Thomas was in a frame of mind very much opposed to impecunious sons-in-law. Previous to attacking her father Gertrude had tried her hand again upon her mother, but Lady Tringle had declined. "If anything is to be done you must do it yourself," Lady Tringle had said.

"Papa," said Gertrude, having followed him into a little sitting-room where he digested and arranged his telegrams when at Merle Park, "I wish something could be settled about Mr. Houston."

Sir Thomas at this moment was very angry. Mr. Traffick had not only asked for the loan of a carriage to take him into Hastings, but had expressed a wish that there might be a peculiar kind of claret served at dinner with which he was conversant and to which he was much attached. "Then," said he, "you may as well have it all settled at once."

"How, papa?"

"You may understand for good and all that I will have nothing to do with Mr. Houston."

"Papa, that would be very cruel."

"My dear, if you call me cruel I will not allow you to come and talk to me at all. Cruel indeed! What is your idea of cruelty?"

"Everybody knows that we are attached to each other."

"Everybody knows nothing of the kind. I know

nothing of the kind. And you are only making a fool of yourself. Mr. Houston is a penniless adventurer and is only attached to my money. He shall never see a penny of it."

"He is not an adventurer, papa. He is much less like an adventurer than Mr. Traffick. He has an income of his own, only it is not much."

"About as much as would pay his bill at the club for cigars and champagne. You may make your mind at rest, for I will not give Mr. Houston a shilling. Why should a man expect to live out of my earnings who never did a day's work in his life?"

Gertrude left the room despondently, as there was nothing more to be done on the occasion. But it seemed to her as though she were being used with the utmost cruelty. Augusta had been allowed to marry her man without a shilling, and had been enriched with £120,000. Why should she be treated worse than Augusta? She was very strongly of opinion that Frank Houston was very much better than Septimus Traffick. Mr. Traffick's aptitude for saving his money was already known to the whole household. Frank would never wish to save. Frank would spend her income for her like a gentleman. Frank would not hang about Glenbogie or Merle Park till he should be turned out. Everybody was fond of Frank. But she, Gertrude, had already learnt to despise Mr. Traffick, Member of Parliament though he was. She had already begun to think that having been chosen by Frank Houston, who was decidedly a man of fashion, she had proved herself to

be of higher calibre than her sister Augusta. But her father's refusal to her had been not only very rough but very decided. She would not abandon her Frank. Such an idea never for a moment crossed her mind. But what step should she next take? Thinking over it during the whole of the day she did at last form a plan. But she greatly feared that the plan would not recommend itself to Mr. Frank Houston. She was not timid, but he might be so. In spite of her father's anger and roughness she would not doubt his ultimate generosity; but Frank might doubt it. If Frank could be induced to come and carry her off from Merle Park and marry her in some manner approved for such occasions, she would stand the risk of getting the money afterwards. But she was greatly afraid that the risk would be too much for Frank. She did not, however, see any other scheme before her. As to waiting patiently till her father's obdurate heart should be softened by the greater obduracy of her own love, there was a tedium and a prolonged dulness in such a prospect which were anything but attractive to her. Had it been possible she would have made a bargain with her father. "If you won't give us £120,000 let us begin with £60,000." But even this she feared would not altogether be agreeable to Frank. Let her think of it how she would, that plan of being run away with seemed alone to be feasible—and not altogether disagreeable.

It was necessary that she should answer her lover's letter. No embargo had as yet been put upon her correspondence,

and therefore she could send her reply without external difficulty.

“Dear Frank,” she said, “I quite agree with you about Christmas. It ought to be settled. But I have very bad news to send to you. I have been to papa as you told me, but he was very unkind. Nothing could be worse. He said that you ought to earn your bread, which is, of course, all humbug. He didn’t understand that there ought to be some gentlemen who never earn their bread. I am sure, if you had been earning your bread by going to Lombard Street every day, I shouldn’t have ever cared for you.

“He says that he will not give a single shilling. I think he is angry because Augusta’s husband will come and live here always. That is disgusting, of course. But it isn’t my fault. It is either that, or else some money has gone wrong;—or perhaps he had a very bad fit of indigestion. He was, however, so savage, that I really do not know how to go to him again. Mamma is quite afraid of him, and does not dare say a word, because it was she who managed about Mr. Traffick.

“What ought to be done? Of course, I don’t like to think that you should be kept waiting. I am not sure that I quite like it myself. I will do anything you propose, and am not afraid of running a little risk. If we could get married without his knowing anything about it, I am sure he would give the money afterwards,—because he is always so good-natured in the long run, and so generous. He can be very savage, but he would be sure to forgive.

“How would it be if I were to go away? I am of age, and I believe that no one could stop me. If you could manage that we should get married in that way, I would do my best. I know people can get themselves married at Ostend. I do not see what else is to be done. You can write to me at present here, and nothing wrong will come of it. But Augusta says that if papa were to begin to suspect anything about my going away he would stop my letters.—Dear Frank, I am yours always, and always most lovingly,

“GERTRUDE.”

“You needn’t be a bit afraid but that I should be quite up to going off if you could arrange it.”

“I believe, papa,” said Mrs. Traffick, on the afternoon of the day on which this was written, “that Gertrude is thinking of doing something wrong, and therefore I feel it to be my duty to bring you this letter.” Augusta had not been enabled to read the letter, but had discussed with her sister the propriety of eloping. “I won’t advise it,” she had said, “but, if you do, Mr. Houston should arrange to be married at Ostend. I know that can be done.” Some second thought had perhaps told her that any such arrangement would be injurious to the noble blood of the Traffick family, and she had therefore “felt it to be her duty” to extract the letter from the family letter-box, and to give it to her father. A daughter who could so excellently do her duty would surely not be turned out before Parliament met.

Sir Thomas took the letter and said not a word to his

elder child. When he was alone he doubted. He was half-minded to send the letter on. What harm could the two fools do by writing to each other? While he held the strings of the purse there could be no marriage. Then he bethought himself of his paternal authority, of the right he had to know all that his daughter did,—and he opened the letter. “There ought to be gentlemen who don’t earn their bread!” “Ought there?” said he to himself. If so these gentlemen ought not to come to him for bread. He was already supporting one such, and that was quite enough. “Mamma is quite afraid of him, and doesn’t dare say a word.” That he rather liked. “I am sure he would give the money afterwards.” “I am sure he would do no such thing,” he said to himself, and he reflected that in such a condition he should rather be delighted than otherwise in watching the impecunious importunities of his baffled son-in-law. The next sentence reconciled his girl to him almost entirely. “He is always so good-natured in the long run, and so generous!” For “good-natured” he did not care much, but he liked to be thought generous. Then he calmly tore the letter in little bits, and threw them into the waste-paper basket.

He sat for ten minutes thinking what he had better do, finding the task thus imposed upon him to be much more difficult than the distribution of a loan. At last he determined that, if he did nothing, things would probably settle themselves. Mr. Houston, when he received no reply from his lady-love, would certainly be quiescent, and Gertrude, without any assent from her lover, could hardly arrange

her journey to Ostend. Perhaps it might be well that he should say a word of caution to his wife ; but as to that he did not at present quite make up his mind, as he was grievously disturbed while he was considering the subject.

“ If you please, Sir Thomas,” said the coachman, hurrying into the room almost without the ceremony of knocking,—“ if you please, Phœbe mare has been brought home with both her knees cut down to the bone.”

“ What ! ” exclaimed Sir Thomas, who indulged himself in a taste for horseflesh, and pretended to know one animal from another.

“ Yes, indeed, Sir Thomas, down to the bone,” said the coachman, who entertained all that animosity against Mr. Traffick which domestics feel for habitual guests who omit the ceremony of tipping. “ Mr. Traffick brought her down on Windover Hill, Sir Thomas, and she’ll never be worth a feed of oats again. I didn’t think a man was born who could throw that mare off her feet, Sir Thomas.” Now Mr. Traffick, when he had borrowed the phaeton and pair of horses that morning to go into Hastings, had dispensed with the services of a coachman, and had insisted on driving himself.

CHAPTER XXX.

AT MERLE PARK. NO. 2.

HAS any irascible reader,—any reader who thoroughly enjoys the pleasure of being in a rage,—encountered suddenly some grievance which, heavy as it may be, has been more than compensated by the privilege it has afforded of blowing-up the offender? Such was the feeling of Sir Thomas as he quickly followed his coachman out of the room. He had been very proud of his Phœbe mare, who could trot with him from the station to the house at the rate of twelve miles an hour. But in his present frame of mind he had liked the mare less than he disliked his son-in-law. Mr. Traffick had done him this injury, and he now had Mr. Traffick on the hip. There are some injuries for which a host cannot abuse his guest. If your best Venetian decanter be broken at table you are bound to look as though you liked it. But if a horse be damaged a similar amount of courtesy is hardly required. The well-nurtured gentleman, even in that case, will only look unhappy and say not a word. Sir Thomas was hardly to be called a well-nurtured gentleman; and then it must be remembered that the offender was his son-in-law. “Good heavens!” he exclaimed, hurrying into the yard. “What is this?”

The mare was standing out on the pavement with three

men around her, of whom one was holding her head, another was down on his knees washing her wounds, and the third was describing the fatal nature of the wounds which she had received. Traffick was standing at a little distance, listening in silence to the implied rebukes of the groom. "Good heavens, what is this?" repeated Sir Thomas, as he joined the conclave.

"There are a lot of loose stones on that hill," said Traffick, "and she tripped on one and came down, all in a lump, before you could look at her. I'm awfully sorry, but it might have happened to any one."

Sir Thomas knew how to fix his darts better than by throwing them direct at his enemy. "She has utterly destroyed herself," said he, addressing himself to the head-groom, who was busily employed with the sponge in his hand.

"I'm afraid she has, Sir Thomas. The joint-oil will be sure to run on both knees; the gashes is so mortal deep."

"I've driven that mare hundreds of times down that hill," said Sir Thomas, "and I never knew her to trip before."

"Never, Sir Thomas," said the groom.

"She'd have come down with you to-day," said Mr. Traffick, defending himself.

"It was my own fault, Bunsum. That's all that can be said about it." Bunsum the groom, kneeling as he was, expressed, by his grimaces, his complete agreement with this last opinion of his master. "Of course I ought to have known that he couldn't drive," said Sir Thomas.

"A horse may fall down with anybody," said Mr. Traffick.

"You'd better take her and shoot her," said Sir Thomas, still addressing the groom. "She was the best thing we had in the stable, but now she is done for." With that he turned away from the yard without having as yet addressed a word to his son-in-law.

This was so intolerable that even Mr. Traffick could not bear it in silence. "I have told you that I am very sorry," said he, following Sir Thomas closely, "and I don't know what a man can do more."

"Nothing,—unless it be not to borrow a horse again."

"You may be sure I will never do that."

"I'm not sure of it at all. If you wanted another tomorrow you'd ask for him if you thought you could get him."

"I call that very uncivil, Sir Thomas,—and very unkind."

"Bother!" said Sir Thomas. "It is no good in being kind to a fellow like you. Did you ever hear what the cabman did who had a sovereign given to him for driving a mile. He asked the fool who gave it him to make it a guinea. I am the fool, and, by George, you are the cabman!" With this Sir Thomas turned into the house by a small door, leaving his son-in-law to wander round to the front by himself.

"Your father has insulted me horribly," he said to his wife, whom he found up in her bed-room.

"What is the matter now, Septimus?"

"That little mare of his, which I have no doubt has come down half a score of times before, fell with me and cut her knees."

"That's Phœbe," said Augusta. "She was his favourite."

"It's a kind of thing that might happen to anyone, and no gentleman thinks of mentioning it. He said such things to me that upon my word I don't think I can stop in the house any longer."

"Oh, yes, you will," said the wife.

"Of course, it is a difference coming from one's father-in-law. It's almost the same as from one's father."

"He didn't mean it, Septimus."

"I suppose not. If he had, I really couldn't have borne it. He does become very rough sometimes, but I know that at bottom he has a thorough respect for me. It is only that induces me to bear it." Then it was settled between husband and wife that they should remain in their present quarters, and that not a word further should be said at any rate by them about the Phœbe mare. Nor did Sir Thomas say another word about the mare, but he added a note to those already written in the tablets of his memory as to his son-in-law, and the note declared that no hint, let it be ever so broad, would be effectual with Mr. Traffick.

The next day was a Sunday, and then another trouble awaited Sir Thomas. At this time it was not customary with Tom to come often to Merle Park. He had his own lodgings in London and his own club, and did not care much for the rural charms of Merle Park. But on this occasion he had condescended to appear, and on the Sun-

day afternoon informed his father that there was a matter which he desired to discuss with him. "Father," said he, "I am getting confoundedly sick of all this."

"Confounded," said Sir Thomas, "is a stupid foolish word, and it means nothing."

"There is a sort of comfort in it, Sir," said Tom; "but if it's objectionable I'll drop it."

"It is objectionable."

"I'll drop it, Sir. But nevertheless I am very sick of it."

"What are you sick of, Tom?"

"All this affair with my cousin."

"Then, if you take my advice, you'll drop that too."

"I couldn't do that, father. A word is all very well. A man can drop a word; but a girl is a different sort of thing. One can't drop a girl, even if one tries."

"Have you tried, Tom?"

"Yes, I have. I've done my best to try. I put it out of my mind for a fortnight and wouldn't think of her. I had a bottle of champagne every day at dinner and then went to the theatre. But it was all of no use. I have set my heart on it and I can't give her up. I'll tell you what I'd like to do. I'd like to give her a diamond necklace."

"It wouldn't be the slightest use," said Sir Thomas, shaking his head.

"Why not? It's what other men do. I mean it to be something handsome;—about three hundred pounds."

"That's a large sum of money for a necklace."

"Some of them cost a deal more than that."

“ And you’d only throw away your money.”

“ If she took it, she’d take me too. If she didn’t,—why I should still have the diamonds. I mean to try any way.”

“ Then it’s of no use your coming to me.”

“ I thought you’d let me have the money. It’s no good running into debt for them. And then if you’d add something of your own,—a locket, or something of that kind,—I think it would have an effect. I have seen a necklace at Ricolay’s, and if I could pay ready money for it I could have 20 per cent. off it. The price named is three hundred guineas. That would make it £254 5s. £250 would buy it if the cheque was offered.”

There was a spirit about the son which was not displeasing to the father. That idea that the gift, if accepted, would be efficacious, or if not that it would be rejected,—so that Tom would not lose his hopes and his diamonds together,—seemed to be sound. Sir Thomas, therefore, promised the money, with the distinct understanding that if the gift were not accepted by Ayala it should be consigned to his own hands. But as for any present from himself, he felt that this would not be the time for it. He had called upon his niece and solicited her himself, and she had been deaf to his words. After that he could not condescend to send her gifts. “ Should she become my promised daughter-in-law then I would send her presents,” said Sir Thomas.

The poor man certainly received less pleasure from his wealth than was credited to him by those who knew his

circumstances. Yet he endeavoured to be good to those around him, and especially good to his children. There had been present to him ever since the beginning of his successes,—ever since his marriage,—a fixed resolution that he would not be a curmudgeon with his money, that he would endeavour to make those happy who depended on him, and that he would be liberal in such settlements for his children as might be conducive to their happiness and fortunes in life. In this way he had been very generous to Mr. Traffick. The man was a Member of Parliament, the son of a peer, and laborious. Why should he expect more? Money was wanting, but he could supply the money. So he had supplied it, and had been content to think that a good man should be propped up in the world by his means. What that had come to the reader knows. He thoroughly detested his son-in-law, and would have given much to have had his money back again,—so that Mr. Traffick should have had no share in it.

Then there was his second daughter! What should be done with Gertrude? The money should be forthcoming for her too if the fitting man could be found. But he would have nothing further to do with a penniless lover, let his position in the world of fashion, or even in the world of politics, be what it might. The man should either have wealth of his own, or should be satisfied to work for it. Houston had been unfortunate in the moment of his approaches. Sir Thomas had been driven by his angry feelings to use hard, sharp words, and now was forced to act up to his words. He declared roughly that Mr. Houston

should not have a shilling of his money,—as he had certainly been justified for doing; and his daughter, who had always been indulged in every kind of luxury, had at once concocted a plot for running away from her home! As he thought of the plot it seemed to be wonderful to him that she should be willing to incur such a danger,—to be ready without a penny to marry a penniless man,—till he confessed to himself that, were she to do so, she would certainly have the money sooner or later. He was capable of passion, capable of flying out and saying a very severe thing to Septimus Traffick or another when his temper was hot; but he was incapable of sustained wrath. He was already aware that if Mr. Traffick chose to stay he would stay;—that if Mr Houston were brave enough to be persistent he might have both the money and the girl. As he thought of it all he was angry with himself, wishing that he were less generous, less soft, less forgiving.

And now here was Tom,—whom at the present moment he liked the best of all his children, who of the three was the least inclined to run counter to him,—ready to break his heart, because he could not get a little chit of a girl of whom he would probably be tired in twelve months after he possessed her! Remembering what Tom had been, he was at a loss to understand how such a lad should be so thoroughly in love. At the present moment, had Ayala been purchaseable, he would have been willing to buy her at a great price, because he would fain have pleased Tom had it been possible. But Ayala, who had not a penny in the world,—who never would have a penny unless

he should give it her,—would not be purchased, and would have nothing to do with Tom! The world was running counter to him, so that he had no pleasure in his home, no pleasure in his money, no pleasure in his children. The little back-parlour in Lombard Street was sweeter to him than Merle Park, with all its charms. His daughter Gertrude wanted to run away from him, while by no inducement could he get Mr. Traffick to leave the house.

While he was in this humour he met his niece Lucy roaming about the garden. He knew the whole story of Lucy's love, and had been induced by his wife to acknowledge that her marriage with the sculptor was not to be sanctioned. He had merely expressed his scorn when the unfortunate circumstances of Hamel's birth had been explained to him again and again. He had ridiculed the horror felt by his wife at the equally ill-born brothers and sisters in Rome. He had merely shaken his head when he was told that Hamel's father never went inside of any place of worship. But when it was explained to him that the young man had, so to say, no income at all, then he was forced to acknowledge that the young man ought not to be allowed to marry his niece.

To Lucy herself he had as yet said nothing on the subject since he had asked the lover in to lunch at Glenbogie. He heard bad accounts of her. He had been told by his wife, on different occasions,—not in the mere way of conversation, but with a premeditated energy of fault-finding,—that Lucy was a disobedient girl. She was worse than Ayala. She persisted in saying that she would marry the

penniless artist as soon as he should profess himself to be ready. It had been different, she had tried to explain to her aunt, before she had been engaged to him. Now she considered herself to be altogether at his disposal. This had been her plea, but her plea had been altogether unacceptable to Aunt Emmeline. "She can do as she pleases, of course," Sir Thomas had said. That might be all very well; but Aunt Emmeline was strongly of opinion that an adopted daughter of Queen's Gate, of Glenbogie, and Merle Park, ought not to be allowed to do as she pleased with herself. A girl ought not to be allowed to have the luxuries of palatial residences, and the luxuries of free liberty of choice at the same time. More than once it had occurred to Sir Thomas that he would put an end to all these miseries by a mere scratch of his pen. It need not be £120,000, or £100,000, as with a daughter. A few modest thousands would do it. And then this man Hamel, though the circumstances of his birth had been unfortunate, was not an idler like Frank Houston. As far as Sir Thomas could learn, the man did work, and was willing to work. The present small income earned would gradually become more. He had a kindly feeling towards Lucy, although he had been inclined to own that her marriage with Hamel was out of the question. "My dear," he said to her, "why are you walking about alone?" She did not like to say that she was walking alone because she had no one to walk with her,—no such companion as Isadore would be if Isadore were allowed to come to Merle Park;

so she simply smiled, and went on by her uncle's side. "Do you like this place as well as Glenbogie?" he asked.

"Oh; yes."

"Perhaps you will be glad to get back to London again?"

"Oh; no."

"Which do you like best, then?"

"They are all so nice, if ——"

"If what, Lucy?"

"*Cælum non animum mutant qui trans mare currunt*," Lucy might have said, had she known the passage. As it was she put the same feeling into simpler words, "I should like one as well as the other, Uncle Tom, if things went comfortably."

"There's a great deal in that," he said. "I suppose the meaning is, that you do not get on well with your aunt?"

"I am afraid she is angry with me, Uncle Tom."

"Why do you make her angry, Lucy? When she tells you what is your duty, why do you not endeavour to do it?"

"I cannot do what she tells me," said Lucy; "and, as I cannot, I think I ought not to be here."

"Have you anywhere else to go to?" To this she made no reply, but walked on in silence. "When you say you ought not to be here, what idea have you formed in your own mind as to the future?"

“ That I shall marry Mr. Hamel, some day.”

“ Do you think it would be well to marry any man without an income to live upon ? Would it be a comfort to him seeing that he had just enough to maintain himself, and no more ? ” These were terrible questions to her,—questions which she could not answer, but yet as to which her mind entertained an easy answer. A little help from him, who was willing to indulge her with so many luxuries while she was under his roof, would enable her to be an assistance rather than a burden to her lover. But of this she could not utter a word. “ Love is all very well,” continued Sir Thomas, in his gruffest voice ; “ but love should be regulated by good sense. It is a crime when two beggars think of marrying each other,—two beggars who are not prepared to live as beggars do.”

“ He is not a beggar,” said Lucy, indignantly. “ He has begged nothing ; nor have I.”

“ Pshaw ! ” said Sir Thomas ; “ I was laying down a general rule. I did not mean to call anybody a beggar. You shouldn’t take me up like that.”

“ I beg your pardon, Uncle Tom,” she said piteously.

“ Very well ; very well ; that will do.” But still he went on walking with her, and she felt she could not leave him till he gave her some signal that she was to go. They continued in this way till they had come nearly round the large garden ; when he stopped, as he was walking, and addressed her again. “ I suppose you write to him sometimes.”

"Yes," said Lucy, boldly.

"Write to him at once, and tell him to come and see me in Lombard Street on Tuesday, at two o'clock. Give me the letter, and I will take care it is sent to him directly I get to town. Now you had better go in, for it is getting very cold."

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE DIAMOND NECKLACE.

TOM went up to London intent upon his diamonds. To tell the truth he had already made the purchase subject to some question of ready money. He now paid for it after considerable chaffering as to the odd pounds, which he succeeded in bringing to a successful termination. Then he carried the necklace away with him, revolving in his mind the different means of presentation. He thought that a letter might be best if only he was master of the language in which such a letter should properly be written. But he entirely doubted his own powers of composition. He was so modest in this respect that he would not even make an attempt. He knew himself well enough to be aware that he was in many respects ignorant. He would have endeavoured to take the bracelet personally to Ayala had he not been conscious that he could not recommend his present with such romantic phrases and touches of poetry as would be gratifying to her fine sense. Were he to find himself in her presence with the necklace he must depend on himself for his words; but a letter might be sent in his own handwriting, the poetry and romance of which might be supplied by another.

Now it had happened that Tom had formed a marvellous

friendship in Rome with Colonel Stubbs. They had been hunting together in the Campagna, and Tom had been enabled to accommodate the Colonel with the loan of a horse when his own had been injured. They had since met in London, and Stubbs had declared to more than one of his friends that Tom, in spite of his rings and his jewelry, was a very good fellow at bottom. Tom had been greatly flattered by the intimacy, and had lately been gratified by an invitation to Aldershot in order that the military glories of the camp might be shown to him. He had accepted the invitation, and a day in the present week had been fixed. Then it occurred to him suddenly that he knew no one so fitted to write such a letter as that demanded as his friend Colonel Jonathan Stubbs. He had an idea that the Colonel, in spite of his red hair and in spite of a certain aptitude for drollery which pervaded him, had a romantic side to his character; and he felt confident that, as to the use of language, the Colonel was very great indeed. He therefore, when he went to Aldershot, carefully put the bracelet in his breast-pocket and determined to reveal his secret and to ask for aid.

The day of his arrival was devoted to the ordinary pursuits of Aldershot and the evening to festivities, which were prolonged too late into the night to enable him to carry out his purpose before he went to bed. He arranged to leave on the next morning by a train between ten and eleven, and was told that three or four men would come in to breakfast at half-past nine. His project then seemed to be all but hopeless. But at last with great courage he made

an effort. "Colonel," said he, just as they were going to bed, "I wonder if you could give me half-an-hour before breakfast. It is a matter of great importance." Tom, as he said this, assumed a most solemn face.

"An hour if you like, my dear boy. I am generally up soon after six, and am always out on horseback before breakfast as soon as the light serves."

"Then if you'll have me called at half-past seven I shall be ever so much obliged to you."

The next morning at eight the two were closeted together, and Tom immediately extracted the parcel from his pocket and opened the diamonds to view. "Upon my word that is a pretty little trinket," said the Colonel, taking the necklace in his hand.

"Three hundred guineas!" said Tom, opening his eyes very wide.

"I daresay."

"That is, it would have been three hundred guineas unless I had come down with the ready. I made the fellow give me twenty per cent. off. You should always remember this when you are buying jewelry."

"And what is to be done with this pretty thing? I suppose it is intended for some fair lady's neck."

"Oh, of course."

"And why has it been brought down to Aldershot? There are plenty of fellows about this place who will get their hands into your pocket if they know that you have such a trinket as that about you."

"I will tell you why I brought it," said Tom, very gravely. "It is, as you say, for a young lady. I intend to make that young lady my wife. Of course this is a secret, you know."

"It shall be sacred as the Pope's toe," said Stubbs.

"Don't joke about it, Colonel, if you please. It's life and death to me."

"I'll keep your secret and will not joke. Now what can I do for you."

"I must send this as a present with a letter. I must first tell you that she has,—well, refused me."

"That never means much the first time, old boy."

"She has refused me half-a-dozen times, but I mean to go on with it. If she refuses me two dozen times I'll try her a third dozen."

"Then you are quite in earnest?"

"I am. It's a kind of thing I know that men laugh about, but I don't mind telling you that I am downright in love with her. The governor approves of it."

"She has got money, probably?"

"Not a shilling;—not as much as would buy a pair of gloves. But I don't love her a bit the less for that. As to income, the governor will stump up like a brick. Now I want you to write the letter."

"It's a kind of thing a third person can't do," said the Colonel, when he had considered the request for a moment.

"Why not? Yes, you can."

"Do it yourself, and say just the simplest words as they come up. They are sure to go further with any girl than

what another man may write. It is impossible that another man should be natural on such a task as that."

"Natural! I don't know about natural," said Tom, who was anxious now to explain the character of the lady in question. "I don't know that a letter that was particularly natural would please her. A touch of poetry and romance would go further than anything natural."

"Who is the lady?" asked the Colonel, who certainly was by this time entitled to be so far inquisitive.

"She is my cousin,—Ayala Dormer."

"Who?"

"Ayala Dormer;—my cousin. She was at Rome, but I do not think you ever saw her there."

"I have seen her since," said the Colonel.

"Have you? I didn't know."

"She was with my aunt, the Marchesa Baldoni."

"Dear me! So she was. I never put the two things together. Don't you admire her?"

"Certainly I do. My dear fellow, I can't write this letter for you." Then he put down the pen which he had taken up as though he had intended to comply with his friend's request. "You may take it as settled that I cannot write it."

"No?"

"Impossible. One man should never write such a letter for another man. You had better give the thing in person,—that is, if you mean to go on with the matter."

"I shall certainly go on with it," said Tom, stoutly.

"After a certain time, you know, reiterated offers do,

you know,—do,—do,—partake of the nature of persecution."

"Reiterated refusals are the sort of persecution I don't like."

"It seems to me that Ayala,—Miss Dormer, I mean,—should be protected by a sort of feeling,—feeling of—of what I may perhaps call her dependent position. She is peculiarly,—peculiarly situated."

"If she married me she would be much better situated. I could give her everything she wants."

"It isn't an affair of money, Mr. Tringle."

Tom felt, from the use of the word *Mister*, that he was in some way giving offence; but felt also that there was no true cause for offence. "When a man offers everything," he said, "and asks for nothing, I don't think he should be said to persecute."

"After a time it becomes persecution. I am sure Ayala would feel it so."

"My cousin can't suppose that I am ill-using her," said Tom, who disliked the "*Ayala*" quite as much as he did the "*Mister*."

"Miss Dormer, I meant. I can have nothing further to say about it. I can't write the letter, and I should not imagine that Ayala,—Miss Dormer,—would be moved in the least by any present that could possibly be made to her. I must go out now, if you don't mind, for half-an-hour; but I shall be back in time for breakfast."

Then Tom was left alone with the necklace lying on the table before him. He knew that something was wrong

with the Colonel, but could not in the least guess what it might be. He was quite aware that early in the interview the Colonel had encouraged him to persevere with the lady, and had then, suddenly, not only advised him to desist, but had told him in so many words that he was bound to desist out of consideration for the lady. And the Colonel had spoken of his cousin in a manner that was distasteful to him. He could not analyse his feelings. He did not exactly know why he was displeased, but he was displeased. The Colonel, when asked for his assistance, was, of course, bound to talk about the lady,—would be compelled, by the nature of the confidence, to mention the lady's name;—would even have been called on to write her Christian name. But this he should have done with a delicacy;—almost with a blush. Instead of that Ayala's name had been common on his tongue. Tom felt himself to be offended, but hardly knew why. And then, why had he been called Mister Tringle? The breakfast, which was eaten shortly afterwards in the company of three or four other men, was not eaten in comfort;—and then Tom hurried back to London and to Lombard Street.

After this failure Tom felt it to be impossible to go to another friend for assistance. There had been annoyance in describing his love to Colonel Stubbs, and pain in the treatment he had received. Even had there been another friend to whom he could have confided the task, he could not have brought himself to encounter the repetition of such treatment. He was as firmly fixed as ever in his conviction that he could not write the letter himself. And,

as he thought of the words with which he should accompany a personal presentation of the necklace, he reflected that in all probability he might not be able to force his way into Ayala's presence. Then a happy thought struck him. Mrs. Dosett was altogether on his side. Everybody was on his side except Ayala herself, and that pigheaded Colonel. Would it not be an excellent thing to entrust the necklace to the hands of his Aunt Dosett, in order that she might give it over to Ayala with all the eloquence in her power. Satisfied with this project he at once wrote a note to Mrs. Dosett.

"MY DEAR AUNT,

"I want to see you on *most important business*. If I shall not be troubling you, I will call upon you to-morrow at ten o'clock, before I go to my place of business.

"Yours affectionately,

"T. TRINGLE, Junior."

On the following morning he apparelled himself with all his rings. He was a good-hearted, well-intentioned young man, with excellent qualities; but he must have been slow of intellect when he had not as yet learnt the deleterious effect of all those rings. On this occasion he put on his rings, his chains, and his bright waistcoat, and made himself a thing disgusting to be looked at by any well-trained female. As far as his aunt was concerned he would have been altogether indifferent as to his appearance, but there was present to his mind some small hope that he might be allowed to see Ayala, as the immediate result of the neck-

lace. Should he see Ayala, then how unfortunate it would be that he should present himself before the eyes of his mistress without those adornments which he did not doubt would be grateful to her. He had heard from Ayala's own lips that all things ought to be pretty. Therefore he endeavoured to make himself pretty. Of course he failed,—as do all men who endeavour to make themselves pretty,—but it was out of the question that he should understand the cause of his failure.

“Aunt Dosett, I want you to do me a very great favour,” he began, with a solemn voice.

“Are you going to a party, Tom,” she said.

“A party! No,—who gives a party in London at this time of the day? Oh, you mean because I have just got a few things on. When I call anywhere I always do. I have got another lady to see, a lady of rank, and so I just made a change.” But this was a fib.

“What can I do for you, Tom?”

“I want you to look at that.” Then he brought out the necklace, and, taking it out of the case, displayed the gems tastefully upon the table.

“I do believe they are diamonds,” said Mrs. Dosett.

“Yes; they are diamonds. I am not the sort of fellow to get anything sham. What do you think that little thing cost, Aunt Dosett?”

“I haven't an idea. Sixty pounds, perhaps!”

“Sixty pounds! Do you go into a jeweller's shop and see what you could do among diamonds with sixty pounds!”

“I never do go into jewellers' shops, Tom.”

"Nor I, very often. It's a sort of place where a fellow can drop a lot of money. But I did go into one after this. It don't look much, does it?"

"It is very pretty."

"I think it is pretty. Well, Aunt Dosett, the price for that little trifle was three—hundred—guineas!" As he said this he looked into his aunt's face for increased admiration.

"You gave three hundred guineas for it!"

"I went with ready money in my hand, when I tempted the man with a cheque to let me have it for two hundred and fifty pounds. In buying jewelry you should always do that."

"I never buy jewelry," said Mrs. Dosett, crossly.

"If you should, I mean. Now, I'll tell you what I want you to do. This is for Ayala."

"For Ayala!"

"Yes, indeed. I am not the fellow to stick at a trifle when I want to carry my purpose. I bought this the other day and gave ready money for it,—two hundred and fifty pounds,—on purpose to give it to Ayala. In naming the value,—of course you'll do that when you give it her,—you might as well say three hundred guineas. That was the price on the ticket. I saw it myself,—so there won't be any untruth you know."

"Am I to give it her?"

"That's just what I want. When I talk to her she flares up, and, as likely as not, she'd fling the necklace at my head."

"She wouldn't do that, I hope."

"It would depend upon how the thing went. When I do talk to her it always seems that nothing I say can be right. Now, if you will give it her you can put in all manner of pretty things."

"This itself will be the prettiest thing," said Mrs. Dosett.

"That's just what I was thinking. Everybody agrees that diamonds will go further with a girl than anything else. When I told the governor he quite jumped at the idea."

"Sir Thomas knows you are giving it?"

"Oh, dear, yes. I had to get the rhino from him. I don't go about with two hundred and fifty pounds always in my own pocket."

"If he had sent the money to Ayala how much better it would have been," said poor Mrs. Dosett.

"I don't think that at all. Who ever heard of making a present to a young lady in money. Ayala is romantic, and that would have been the most unromantic thing out. That would not have done me the least good in the world. It would simply have gone to buy boots and petticoats and such like. A girl would never be brought to think of her lover merely by putting on a pair of boots. When she fastens such a necklace as this round her throat he ought to have a chance. Don't you think so, Aunt Dosett?"

"Tom, shall I tell you something?" said the aunt.

"What is it, Aunt Dosett?"

"I don't believe that you have a chance."

"Do you mean that?" he asked, sorrowfully.

"I do."

"You think that the necklace will do no good?"

"Not the least. Of course I will offer it to her if you wish it, because her uncle and I quite approve of you as a husband for Ayala. But I am bound to tell you the truth. I do not think the necklace will do you any good." Then he sat silent for a time, meditating upon his condition. It might be imprudent;—it might be a wrong done to his father to jeopardise the necklace. How could it be if Ayala were to take the necklace and not to take him? "Am I to give it?" she asked.

"Yes," said he, bravely, but with a sigh; "give it her all the same."

"From you or from Sir Thomas?"

"Oh, from me;—from me. If she were told it came from the governor she'd keep it whether or no. I am sure I hope she will keep it," he said, trying to remove the bad impression which his former words might perhaps have left.

"You may be sure she will not keep it," said Mrs. Dosett, "unless she should intend to accept your hand. Of that I can hold out no hope to you. There is a matter, Tom, which I think I should tell you as you are so straightforward in your offer. Another gentleman has asked her to marry him."

"She has accepted him!" exclaimed Tom.

"No, she has not accepted him. She has refused him."

"Then I'm just where I was," said Tom.

"She has refused him, but I think that she is in a sort of way attached to him; and though he too has been refused I imagine that his chance is better than yours."

"And who the d—— is he?" said Tom, jumping up from his seat in great excitement.

"Tom!" exclaimed Mrs. Dosett.

"I beg your pardon; but you see this is very important. Who is the fellow?"

"He is one Colonel Jonathan Stubbs."

"Who?"

"Colonel Jonathan Stubbs."

"Impossible! It can't be Colonel Stubbs. I know Colonel Stubbs."

"I can assure you it is true, Tom. I have had a letter from a lady,—a relative of Colonel Stubbs,—telling me the whole story."

"Colonel Stubbs!" he said. "That passes anything I ever heard. She has refused him?"

"Yes, she has refused him."

"And has not accepted him since?"

"She certainly has not accepted him yet."

"You may give her the bracelet all the same," said Tom, hurrying out of the room. That Colonel Stubbs should have made an offer to Ayala, and yet have accepted his, Tom Tringle's, confidence!

CHAPTER XXXII.

TOM'S DESPAIR.

THE reader will understand that the fate of the necklace was very soon decided. Ayala declared that it was very beautiful. She had, indeed, a pretty taste for diamonds, and would have been proud enough to call this necklace her own; but, as she declared to her aunt, she would not accept Tom though he were made of diamonds from head to foot. Accept Tom, when she could not even bring herself to think of becoming the wife of Jonathan Stubbs! If Colonel Stubbs could not be received by her imagination as an Angel of Light, how immeasurably distant from anything angelic must be Tom Tringle! "Of course it must go back," she said, when the question had to be decided as to the future fate of the necklace. As a consequence poor Mr. Dosett was compelled to make a special journey into the City, and to deposit a well-sealed parcel in the hands of Tom Tringle himself. "Your cousin sends her kind regards," he said, "but cannot bring herself to accept your magnificent present."

Tom had been very much put about since his visit to the Crescent. Had his aunt merely told him that his present would be inefficacious, he would have taken that assurance as being simply her opinion, and would have

still entertained some hopes in the diamonds. But these tidings as to another lover crushed him altogether. And such a lover! The very man whom he had asked to write his letter for him! Why had not Colonel Stubbs told him the truth when thus his own secret had become revealed by an accident? He understood it all now,—the “Ayala,” and the “Mister,” and the reason why the Colonel could not write the letter. Then he became very angry with the Colonel, whom he bitterly accused of falsehood and treason. What right had the Colonel to meddle with his cousin at all? And how false he had been to say nothing of what he himself had done when his rival had told him everything! In this way he made up his mind that it was his duty to hate Colonel Stubbs, and if possible to inflict some personal punishment upon him. He was reckless of himself now, and, if he could only get one good blow at the Colonel's head with a thick stick, would be indifferent as to what the law might do with him afterwards. Or perhaps he might be able to provoke Colonel Stubbs to fight with him. He had an idea that duels at present were not in fashion. But nevertheless, in such a case as this, a man ought to fight. He could at any rate have the gratification of calling the Colonel a coward if he should refuse to fight.

He was the more wretched because his spirit within him was cowed by the idea of the Colonel. He did acknowledge to himself that his chance could be but bad while such a rival as Colonel Stubbs stood in his way. He tried to argue with himself that it was not so. As far as he

knew, Colonel Stubbs was and would remain a very much less rich man than himself. He doubted very much whether Colonel Stubbs could keep a carriage in London for his wife, while it had been already arranged that he was to be allowed to do so should he succeed in marrying Ayala. To be a partner in the house of Travers and Treason was a much greater thing than to be a Colonel. But, though he assured himself of all this again and again, still he was cowed. There was something about the Colonel which did more than redeem his red hair and ugly mouth. And of this something poor Tom was sensible. Nevertheless, if occasion should arise he thought that he could "punch the Colonel's head";—not without evil consequence to himself;—but still that he could "punch the Colonel's head," not minding the consequences.

Such had been his condition of mind when he left the Crescent, and it was not improved by the receipt of the parcel. He hardly said a word when his uncle put it into his hands, merely muttering something and consigning the diamonds to his desk. He did not tell himself that Ayala must now be abandoned. It would have been better for him if he could have done so. But all real, springing, hopeful hope departed from his bosom. This came from the Colonel, rather than from the rejected necklace.

"Did you send that jewelry?" his father asked him some days afterwards.

"Yes; I sent it."

"And what has now become of it?"

"It is in my desk there."

“ Did she send it back again ? ”

“ It came back. My Uncle Dosett brought it. I do not want to say anything more about it, if you please.”

“ I am sorry for that, Tom ;—very sorry. As you had set your heart upon it I wish it could have been as you would have it. But the necklace should not be left there.” Tom shook his head in despair.

“ You had better let me have the necklace. It is not that I should grudge it to you, Tom, if it could do you any good.”

“ You shall have it, Sir.”

“ It will be better so. That was the understanding.” Then the necklace was transferred to some receptacle belonging to Sir Thomas himself, the lock of which might probably be more secure than that of Tom’s desk, and there it remained in its case, still folded in the various papers in which Mrs. Dosett had encased it.

Then Tom found it necessary to adopt some other mode of life for his own consolation and support. He had told his father on one occasion that he had devoted himself for a fortnight to champagne and the theatres. But this had been taken as a joke. He had been fairly punctual at his place of business and had shown no symptoms of fast living. But now it occurred to him that fast living would be the only thing for him. He had been quite willing to apply himself to marriage and a steady life ; but fortune had not favoured him. If he drank too much now, and lay in bed, and became idle, it was not his fault. There came into his head an idea that Ayala and Colonel Stubbs

between them must look to that. Could he meet Ayala he would explain to her how his character as a moral man had been altogether destroyed by her conduct;—and should he meet Colonel Stubbs he would explain something to him also.

A new club had been established in London lately called the Mountaineers, which had secured for itself handsome lodgings in Piccadilly, and considered itself to be, among clubs, rather a comfortable institution than otherwise. It did not as yet affect much fashion, having hitherto secured among its members only two lords,—and they were lords by courtesy. But it was a pleasant, jovial place, in which the delights of young men were not impeded by the austerity of their elders. Its name would be excused only on the plea that all other names available for a club had already been appropriated in the metropolis. There was certainly nothing in the club peculiarly applicable to mountains. But then there are other clubs in London with names which might be open to similar criticism. It was the case that many young men engaged in the City had been enrolled among its members, and it was from this cause, no doubt, that Tom Tringle was regarded as being a leading light among the Mountaineers. It was here that the champagne had been drunk to which Tom had alluded when talking of his love to his father. Now, in his despair, it seemed good to him to pass a considerable portion of his time among the Mountaineers.

“ You’ll dine here, Faddle ? ” he said one evening to a special friend of his, a gentleman also from the City, with

whom he had been dining a good deal during the last week.

"I suppose I shall," said Faddle, "but ain't we coming it a little strong? They want to know at the Gardens what the deuce it is I'm about." The Gardens was a new row of houses, latterly christened Badminton Gardens, in which resided the father and mother of Faddle.

"I've given up all that kind of thing," said Tom.

"Your people are not in London."

"It will make no difference when they do come up. I call an evening in the bosom of one's family about the slowest thing there is. The bosom must do without me for the future."

"Won't your governor cut up rough?"

"He must cut up as he pleases. But I rather fancy he knows all about it. I shan't spend half as much money this way as if I had a house and wife and family,—and what we may call a bosom of one's own." Then they had dinner and went to the theatre, and played billiards, and had supper, and spent the night in a manner very delightful, no doubt, to themselves, but of which their elder friends could hardly have approved.

There was a good deal of this following upon the episode of the necklace, and it must be told with regret that our young hero fell into certain exploits which were by no means creditable to him. More than one good-humoured policeman had helped him home to his lodgings; but alas, on Christmas Eve, he fell into the hands of some guardian of the peace who was not quite sufficiently good-natured, and

Tom passed the night and the greater part of the following morning, recumbent, he in one cell, and his friend Faddle in the next, with an intimation that they would certainly be taken before a magistrate on the day after Christmas Day.

Oh, Ayala! Ayala! It must be acknowledged that you were in a measure responsible;—and not only for the lamentable condition of your lover, but also of that of his friend. For, in his softer moments, Tom had told every thing to Faddle, and Faddle had declared that he would be true to the death to a friend suffering such unmerited misfortune. Perhaps the fidelity of Faddle may have owed something to the fact that Tom's pecuniary allowances were more generous than those accorded to himself. To Ayala must be attributed the occurrence of these misfortunes. But Tom in his more fiery moments,—those moments which would come between the subsidence of actual sobriety and the commencement of intoxication,—attributed all his misfortunes to the Colonel. "Faddle," he would say in these moments, "of course I know that I'm a ruined man. Of course I'm aware that all this is only a prelude to some ignominious end. I have not sunk to this kind of thing without feeling it." "You'll be right enough some day, old fellow," Faddle would reply. "I shall live to be godfather to the first boy," "Never, Faddle!" Tom replied. "All those hopes have vanished. You'll never live to see any child of mine. And I know well where to look for my enemy. Stubbs indeed! I'll Stubbs him. If I can only live to be revenged on that

traitor then I shall die contented. Though he shot me through the heart, I should die contented."

This had happened a little before that unfortunate Christmas Eve. Up to this time Sir Thomas, though he had known well that his son had not been living as he should do, had been mild in his remonstrances, and had said nothing at Merle Park to frighten Lady Tringle. But the affair of Christmas Eve came to his ears with all its horrors. A policeman whom Tom had struck with his fist in the pit of the stomach had not been civil enough to accept this mark of familiarity with good humour. He had been much inconvenienced by the blow, and had insisted upon giving testimony to this effect before the magistrate. There had been half-an-hour, he said, in which he had hung dubious between this world and the next, so great had been the violence of the blow, and so deadly its direction! The magistrate was one of those just men who find a pleasure and a duty in protecting the police of the metropolis. It was no case, he declared, for a fine. What would be a fine to such a one as Thomas Tringle, junior! And Tom,—Tom Tringle, the only son of Sir Thomas Tringle, the senior partner in the great house of Travers and Treason,—was ignominiously locked up for a week. Faddle, who had not struck the blow, was allowed to depart with a fine and a warning. Oh, Ayala, Ayala, this was thy doing!

When the sentence was known Sir Thomas used all his influence to extricate his unfortunate son, but in vain. Tom went through his penalty, and, having no help from

champagne, doubtless had a bad time of it. Ayala, Stubbs, the policeman, and the magistrate, seemed to have conspired to destroy him. But the week at last dragged itself out, and then Tom found himself confronted with his father in the back-parlour of the house in Queen's Gate. "Tom," he said, "this is very bad!"

"It is bad, Sir," said Tom.

"You have disgraced me, and your mother, and yourself. You have disgraced Travers and Treason!" Poor Tom shook his head. "It will be necessary, I fear, that you should leave the house altogether." Tom stood silent without a word. "A young man who has been locked up in prison for a week for maltreating a policeman can hardly expect to be entrusted with such concerns as those of Travers and Treason. I and your poor mother cannot get rid of you and the disgrace which you have entailed upon us. Travers and Treason can easily get rid of you." Tom knew very well that his father was, in fact, Travers and Treason, but he did not yet feel that an opportunity had come in which he could wisely speak a word. "What have you got to say for yourself, Sir?" demanded Sir Thomas.

"Of course, I'm very sorry," muttered Tom.

"Sorry, Tom! A young man holding your position in Travers and Treason ought not to have to be sorry for having been locked up in prison for a week for maltreating a policeman! What do you think must be done, yourself?"

"The man had been hauling me about in the street."

"You were drunk, no doubt."

"I had been drinking. I am not going to tell a lie about it. But he needn't have done as he did. Faddle knows that, and can tell you."

"What can have driven you to associate with such a young man as Faddle? That is the worst part of it. Do you know what Faddle and Company are,—stock jobbers, who ten years ago hadn't a thousand pounds in the way of capital among them! They've been connected with a dozen companies, none of which are floating now, and have made money out of them all! Do you think that Travers and Treason will accept a young man as a partner who associates with such people as that?"

"I have seen old Faddle's name and yours on the same prospectus together, Sir."

"What has that to do with it? You never saw him inside our counter. What a name to appear along with yours in such an affair as this! If it hadn't been for that, you might have got over it. Young men will be young men. Faddle! I think you will have to go abroad for a time, till it has been forgotten."

"I should like to stay, just at present, Sir," said Tom.

"What good can you do?"

"All the same, I should like to stay, Sir."

"I was thinking that, if you were to take a tour through the United States, go across to San Francisco, then up to Japan, and from thence through some of the Chinese cities down to Calcutta and Bombay, you might come back by the Euphrates Valley to Constantinople, see something of

Bulgaria and those countries, and so home by Vienna and Paris. The Euphrates Valley Railway will be finished by that time, perhaps, and Bulgaria will be as settled as Hertfordshire. You'd see something of the world, and I could let it be understood that you were travelling on behalf of Travers and Treason. By the time that you were back, people in the City would have forgotten the policeman, and if you could manage to write home three or four letters about our trade with Japan and China, they would be willing to forget Faddle."

"But, Sir ——"

"Shouldn't you like a tour of that kind?"

"Very much indeed, Sir;—only——"

"Only what, Tom?"

"Ayala!" said Tom, hardly able to suppress a sob as he uttered the fatal name.

"Tom, don't be a fool. You can't make a young woman have you if she doesn't choose. I have done all that I could for you, because I saw that you'd set your heart upon it. I went to her myself, and then I gave two hundred and fifty pounds for that bauble. I am told I shall have to lose a third of the sum in getting rid of it."

"Ricolay told me that he'd take it back at two hundred and twenty," said Tom, whose mind, prostrate as it was, was still alive to consideration of profit and loss.

"Never mind that for the present," said Sir Thomas. "Don't you remember the old song?—'If she will, she will, you may depend on't. And if she won't she won't; and there's an end on't.' You ought to be a man and

pluck up your spirits. Are you going to allow a little girl to knock you about in that way?" Tom only shook his head, and looked as if he was very ill. In truth, the champagne, and the imprisonment, and Ayala together, had altogether altered his appearance. "We've done what we could about it, and now it is time to give it over. Let me hear you say that you will give it over." Tom stood speechless before his father. "Speak the word, and the thing will be done," continued Sir Thomas, endeavouring to encourage the young man.

"I can't," said Tom, sighing.

"Nonsense!"

"I have tried, and I can't."

"Tom, do you mean to say that you are going to lose everything because a chit of a girl like that turns up her nose at you?"

"It's no use my going while things are like this," said Tom. "If I were to get to New York, I should come back by the next ship. As for letters about business, I couldn't settle my mind to anything of the kind."

"Then you're not the man I took you to be," said the father.

"I could be man enough," said Tom, clenching his fist, if I could get hold of Colonel Stubbs."

"Colonel who?"

"Stubbs! Jonathan Stubbs! I know what I'm talking about. I'm not going to America, nor China, nor anything else, till I've polished him off. It's all very well your abusing me, but you don't know what it is I have suffered.

As for being called a man I don't care about it. What I should like best would be to get Ayala on one side and Stubbs on the other, and then all three to go off the Duke of York's Column together. It's no good talking about Travers and Treason. I don't care for Travers and Treason as I am now. If you'll get Ayala to say that she'll have me, I'll go to the shop every morning at eight and stay till nine; and as for the Mountaineers it may all go to the d—— for me." Then he rushed out of the room, banging the door after him.

Sir Thomas, when he was thus left, stood for awhile with his hands in his trousers' pockets, contemplating the condition of his son. It was wonderful to him that a boy of his should be afflicted in this manner. When he had been struck by the juvenile beauties of Emmeline Dosett he had at once asked the young lady to share his fortunes with him, and the young lady had speedily acceded to his request. Then he had been married, and that was all he had ever known of the troubles of love. He could not but think, looking back at it as he did now from a distance, that had Emmeline been hard-hearted he would have endured the repulse and have passed on speedily to some other charmer. But Tom had been wounded after a fashion which seemed to him to have been very uncommon. It might be possible that he should recover in time, but while undergoing recovery he would be ruined;—so great were the young man's sufferings! Now Sir Thomas, though he had spoken to Tom with all the severity which he had been able to assume, though he had abused Faddle, and had vin-

dedicated the injured dignity of Travers and Treason with all his eloquence ; though he had told Tom it was unmanly to give way to his love, yet, of living creatures, Tom was at this moment the dearest to his heart. He had never for an instant entertained the idea of expelling Tom from Travers and Treason because of the policeman, or because of Faddle. What should he do for the poor boy now? Was there any argument, any means of persuasion, by which he could induce that foolish little girl to accept all the good things which he was ready to do for her? Could he try yet once again himself, with any chance of success?

Thinking of all this, he stood there for an hour alone with his hands in his trousers' pockets.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

ISADORE HAMEL IN LOMBARD STREET.

IN following the results of Tom's presentation of the necklace we have got beyond the period which our story is presumed to have reached. Tom was in durance during the Christmas week, but we must go back to the promise which had been made by her uncle, Sir Thomas, to Lucy about six weeks before that time. The promise had extended only to an undertaking on the part of Sir Thomas to see Isadore Hamel if he would call at the house in Lombard Street at a certain hour on a certain day. Lucy was overwhelmed with gratitude when the promise was made. A few moments previously she had been indignant because her uncle had appeared to speak of her and her lover as two beggars,—but Sir Thomas had explained and in some sort apologised, and then had come the promise which to Lucy seemed to contain an assurance of effectual aid. Sir Thomas would not have asked to see the lover had he intended to be hostile to the lover. Something would be done to solve the difficulty which had seemed to Lucy to be so grave. She would not any longer be made to think that she should give up either her lover or her home under her uncle's roof. This had been terribly distressing to her because she had been well aware that on

leaving her uncle's house she could be taken in only by her lover, to whom an immediate marriage would be ruinous. And yet she could not undertake to give up her lover. Therefore her uncle's promise had made her very happy, and she forgave the ungenerous allusion to the two beggars.

The letter was written to Isadore in high spirits. "I do not know what Uncle Tom intends, but he means to be kind. Of course you must go to him, and if I were you I would tell him everything about everything. He is not strict and hard like Aunt Emmeline. She means to be good too, but she is sometimes so very hard. I am happier now because I think something will be done to relieve you from the terrible weight which I am to you. I sometimes wish that you had never come to me in Kensington Gardens, because I have become such a burden to you."

There was much more in which Lucy no doubt went on to declare that, burden as she was, she intended to be persistent. Hamel, when he received this letter, was resolved to keep the appointment made for him, but his hopes were not very high. He had been angry with Lady Tringle,—in the first place, because of her treatment of himself at Glenbogie, and then much more strongly, because she had been cruel to Lucy. Nor did he conceive himself to be under any strong debt of gratitude to Sir Thomas, though he had been invited to lunch. He was aware that the Tringles had despised him, and he repaid the compliment with all his heart by despising the Tringles. They were to him samples of the sort of people which he thought to

be of all the most despicable. They were not only vulgar and rich, but purse-proud and conceited as well. To his thinking there was nothing of which such people were entitled to be proud. Of course they make money,—money out of money, an employment which he regarded as vile,—creating nothing either useful or beautiful. To create something useful was, to his thinking, very good. To create something beautiful was almost divine. To manipulate millions till they should breed other millions was the meanest occupation for a life's energy. It was thus, I fear, that Mr. Hamel looked at the business carried on in Lombard Street, being as yet very young in the world and seeing many things with distorted eyes.

He was aware that some plan would be proposed to him which might probably accelerate his marriage, but was aware also that he would be very unwilling to take advice from Sir Thomas. Sir Thomas, no doubt, would be coarse and rough, and might perhaps offer him pecuniary assistance in a manner which would make it impossible for him to accept it. He had told himself a score of times that, poor as he was, he did not want any of the Tringle money. His father's arbitrary conduct towards him had caused him great misery. He had been brought up in luxury, and had felt it hard enough to be deprived of his father's means because he would not abandon the mode of life that was congenial to him. But having been thus, as it were, cast off by his father, he had resolved that it behoved him to depend only on himself. In the matter of his love he was specially prone to be indignant and independent. No one

had a right to dictate to him, and he would follow the dictation of none. To Lucy alone did he acknowledge any debt, and to her he owed everything. But even for her sake he could not condescend to accept Sir Thomas's money, and with his money his advice. Lucy had begged him in her letter to tell everything to her uncle. He would tell Sir Thomas everything as to his income, his prospects, and his intentions, because Sir Thomas as Lucy's uncle would be entitled to such information. But he thought it very improbable that he should accept any counsel from Sir Thomas.

Such being the condition of Hamel's mind it was to be feared that but little good would come from his visit to Lombard Street. Lucy had simply thought that her uncle, out of his enormous stores, would provide an adequate income. Hamel thought that Sir Thomas, out of his enormous impudence, would desire to dictate everything. Sir Thomas was, in truth, anxious to be good-natured, and to do a kindness to his niece ; but was not willing to give his money without being sure that he was putting it into good hands.

"Oh, you're Hamel," said a young man to him, speaking to him across the counter in the Lombard Street office. This was Tom, who, as the reader will remember, had not yet got into his trouble on account of the policeman.

Tom and Hamel had never met but once before, for a few moments in the Coliseum at Rome, and the artist, not remembering him, did not know by whom he was accosted in this familiar manner. "That is my name, Sir," said

Hamel. "Here is my card. Perhaps you will do me the kindness to take it to Sir Thomas Tringle."

"All right, old fellow ; I know all about it. He has got Puxley with him from the Bank of England just at this moment. Come through into this room. He'll soon have polished off old Puxley." Tom was no more to Hamel than any other clerk, and he felt himself to be aggrieved ; but he followed Tom into the room as he was told, and then prepared to wait in patience for the convenience of the great man. "So you and Lucy are going to make a match of it," said Tom.

This was terrible to Hamel. Could it be possible that all the clerks in Lombard Street talked of his Lucy in this way, because she was the niece of their senior partner ? Were all the clerks, as a matter of course, instructed in the most private affairs of the Tringle family ? "I am here in obedience to directions from Sir Thomas," said Hamel, ignoring altogether the impudent allusion which the young man had made.

"Of course you are. Perhaps you don't know who I am ?"

"Not in the least," said Hamel.

"I am Thomas Tringle, junior," said Tom, with a little accession of dignity.

"I beg your pardon ; I did not know," said Hamel.

"You and I ought to be thick," rejoined Tom, "because I'm going in for Ayala. Perhaps you've heard that before?"

Hamel had heard it and was well aware that Tom was to Ayala an intolerable burden, like the old man of the sea.

He had heard of Tom as poor Ayala's pet aversion,—as a lover not to be shaken off though he had been refused a score of times. Ayala was to the sculptor only second in sacredness to Lucy. And now he was told by Tom himself that he was—"going in for Ayala." The expression was so distressing to his feelings that he shuddered when he heard it. Was it possible that any one should say of him that he was "going in" for Lucy? At that moment Sir Thomas opened the door, and grasping Hamel by the hand led him away into his own sanctum.

"And now, Mr. Hamel," said Sir Thomas, in his cheeriest voice, "how are you?" Hamel declared that he was very well, and expressed a hope that Sir Thomas was the same. "I am not so young as I was, Mr. Hamel. My years are heavier and so is my work. That's the worst of it. When one is young and strong one very often hasn't enough to do. I daresay you find it so sometimes."

"In our profession," said Hamel, "we go on working, though very often we do not sell what we do."

"That's bad," said Sir Thomas.

"It is the case always with an artist before he has made a name for himself. It is the case with many up to the last day of a life of labour. An artist has to look for that, Sir Thomas."

"Dear me! That seems very sad. You are a sculptor, I believe?"

"Yes, Sir Thomas."

"And the things you make must take a deal of room and be very heavy." At this Mr. Hamel only smiled. "Don't

you think if you were to call an auction you'd get something for them?" At this suggestion the sculptor frowned but condescended to make no reply. Sir Thomas went on with his suggestion. "If you and half-a-dozen other beginners made a sort of gallery among you, people would buy them as they do those things in the Marylebone Road and stick them up somewhere about their grounds. It would be better than keeping them and getting nothing." Hamel had in his studio at home an allegorical figure of Italia United, and another of a Prostrate Roman Catholic Church, which in his mind's eye he saw for a moment stuck here or there about the gardens of some such place as Glenbogie! Into them had been infused all the poetry of his nature and all the conviction of his intelligence. He had never dreamed of selling them. He had never dared to think that any lover of Art would encourage him to put into marble those conceptions of his genius which now adorned his studio, standing there in plaster of Paris. But to him they were so valuable, they contained so much of his thoughts, so many of his aspirations, that even had the marble counterparts been ordered and paid for nothing would have induced him to part with the originals. Now he was advised to sell them by auction in order that he might rival those grotesque tradesmen whose business it is to populate the gardens of wealthy but tasteless Britons! It was thus that the idea represented itself to him. He simply smiled; but Sir Thomas did not fail to appreciate the smile.

"And now about this young lady?" said Sir Thomas, not altogether in so good a humour as he had been when

he began his suggestion. "It's a bad look out for her when, as you say, you cannot sell your work when you've done it."

"I think you do not quite understand the matter, Sir Thomas."

"Perhaps not. It certainly does seem unintelligible that a man should lumber himself up with a lot of things which he cannot sell. A tradesman would know that he must get into the bankruptcy court if he were to go on like that. And what is sauce for the goose will be sauce for the gander also." Mr. Hamel again smiled but held his tongue. "If you can't sell your wares how can you keep a wife?"

"My wares, as you call them, are of two kinds. One, though no doubt made for sale, is hardly saleable. The other is done to order. Such income as I make comes from the latter."

"Heads," suggested Sir Thomas.

"Busts they are generally called."

"Well, busts. I call them heads. They are heads. A bust, I take it, is —— well, never mind." Sir Thomas found a difficulty in defining his idea of a bust. "A man wants to have something more or less like some one to put up in a church and then he pays you."

"Or perhaps in his library. But he can put it where he likes when he has bought it."

"Just so. But there ain't many of those come in your way, if I understand right."

"Not as many as I would wish."

"What can you net at the end of the year? That's the question."

Lucy had recommended him to tell Sir Thomas everything; and he had come there determined to tell at any rate everything referring to money. He had not the slightest desire to keep the amount of his income from Sir Thomas. But the questions were put to him in so distasteful a way that he could not bring himself to be confidential. "It varies with various circumstances, but it is very small."

"Very small? Five hundred a year?" This was ill-natured, because Sir Thomas knew that Mr. Hamel did not earn five hundred a year. But he was becoming acerbated by the young man's manner.

"Oh dear, no," said Hamel.

"Four hundred?"

"Nor four hundred,—nor three. I have never netted three hundred in one year after paying the incidental expenses."

"That seems to me to be uncommonly little for a young man who is thinking of marrying. Don't you think you had better give it up?"

"I certainly think nothing of the kind."

"Does your father do anything for you?"

"Nothing at all."

"He also makes heads?"

"Heads,—and other things."

"And sells them when he has made them."

"Yes, Sir Thomas; he sells them. He had a hard time once, but now he is run after. He refuses more orders than he can accept."

"And he won't do anything for you."

“Nothing. He has quarreled with me.”

“That is very bad. Well now, Mr. Hamel, would you mind telling me what your ideas are?” Sir Thomas, when he asked the question, still intended to give assistance, was still minded that the young people should by his assistance be enabled to marry. But he was strongly of opinion that it was his duty, as a rich and protecting uncle, to say something about imprudence, and to magnify difficulties. It certainly would be wrong for an uncle, merely because he was rich, to give away his money to dependent relatives without any reference to those hard principles which a possessor of money always feels it to be his business to inculcate. And up to this point Hamel had done nothing to ingratiate himself. Sir Thomas was beginning to think that the sculptor was an impudent prig, and to declare to himself that, should the marriage ever take place, the young couple would not be made welcome at Glenbogie or Merle Park. But still he intended to go on with his purpose, for Lucy’s sake. Therefore he asked the sculptor as to his ideas generally.

“My idea is that I shall marry Miss Dormer, and support her on the earnings of my profession. My idea is that I shall do so before long, in comfort. My idea also is, that she will be the last to complain of any discomfort which may arise from my straitened circumstances at present. My idea is that I am preparing for myself a happy and independent life. My idea also is,—and I assure you that of all my ideas this is the one to which I cling with the fondest assurance,—that I will do my very best to make her life happy when she comes to grace my home.”

There was a manliness in this which would have touched Sir Thomas had he been in a better humour, but, as it was, he had been so much irritated by the young man's manner, that he could not bring himself to be just. "Am I to understand that you intend to marry on something under three hundred a year?"

Hamel paused a moment before he made his reply. "How am I to answer such a question," he said, at last, "seeing that Miss Dormer is in your hands, and that you are unlikely to be influenced by anything that I may say?"

"I shall be very much influenced," said Sir Thomas.

"Were her father still alive, I think we should have put our heads together, and between us decided on what might have been best for Lucy's happiness."

"Do you think that I'm indifferent to her happiness?" demanded Sir Thomas.

"I should have suggested to him," continued Hamel, not noticing the last question, "that she should remain in her own home till I could make one for her worthy of her acceptance. And then we should have arranged among us what would have been best for her happiness. I cannot do this with you. If you tell her to-morrow that she must give up either your protection or her engagement with me, then she must come to me, and make the best of all the little that I can do for her."

"Who says that I'm going to turn her out?" said Sir Thomas, rising angrily from his chair.

"I do not think that any one has said this of you."

"Then why do you throw it in my teeth?"

"Because your wife has threatened it."

Then Sir Thomas boiled over in his anger. "No one has threatened it. It is untrue. You are guilty both of impertinence and untruth in saying so." Here Hamel rose from his chair, and took up his hat. "Stop, young man, and hear what I have to say to you. I have done nothing but good to my niece."

"Nevertheless, it is true, Sir Thomas, that she has been told by your wife that she must either abandon me or the protection of your roof. I find no fault with Lady Tringle for saying so. It may have been the natural expression of a judicious opinion. But when you ask after my intentions in reference to your niece I am bound to tell you that I propose to subject her to the undoubted inconveniences of my poor home, simply because I find her to be threatened with the loss of another."

"She has not been threatened, Sir."

"You had better ask your wife, Sir Thomas. And, if you find that what I have said is true, I think you will own that I have been obliged to explain myself as I have done. As you have told me to my face that I have been guilty of untruth, I shall now leave you." With this he walked out of the room, and the words which Sir Thomas threw after him had no effect in recalling him.

It must be acknowledged that Hamel had been very foolish in referring to Aunt Emmeline's threat. Who does not know that words are constantly used which are intended to have no real effect? Who does not know that an angry woman will often talk after this fashion? But it was certainly the fact that Aunt Emmeline had more than once

declared to Lucy that she could not be allowed to remain one of that family unless she would give up her lover. Lucy, in her loyal endeavours to explain to her lover her own position, had told him of the threat, and he, from that moment, had held himself prepared to find a home for his future wife should that threat be carried into execution. Sir Thomas was well aware that such words had been spoken, but he knew his wife, and knew how little such words signified. His wife, without his consent, would not have the power to turn a dog from Merle Park. The threat had simply been an argument intended to dissuade Lucy from her choice ; and now it had been thrown in his teeth just when he had intended to make provision for this girl, who was not, in truth, related to him, in order that he might ratify her choice ! He was very angry with the young prig who had thus rushed out of his presence. He was angry, too, with his wife, who had brought him into his difficulty by her foolish threat. But he was angry, also, with himself, knowing that he had been wrong to accuse the man of a falsehood.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

“ I NEVER THREATENED TO TURN YOU OUT.”

THEN there were written the following letters, which were sent and received before Sir Thomas went to Merle Park, and therefore, also, before he again saw Lucy.

“ DEAREST, DEAREST LOVE,

“ I have been, as desired, to Lombard Street, but I fear that my embassy has not led to any good. I know myself to be about as bad an ambassador as any one can send. An ambassador should be soft and gentle,—willing to make the best of everything, and never prone to take offence, nor should he be addicted specially to independence. I am ungente, and apt to be suspicious,—especially if anything be said derogatory to my art. I am proud of being an artist, but I am often ashamed of myself because I exhibit my pride. I may say the same of my spirit of independence. I am determined to be independent if I live,—but I find my independence sometimes kicking up its heels, till I hate it myself.

“ From this you will perceive that I have not had a success in Lombard Street. I was quite willing to answer your uncle any questions he could ask about money. Indeed, I had no secret from him on any subject. But when he subjected me to cross-examination, forcing me into a

bathos of poverty, as he thought, I broke down. 'Not five hundred a-year!' 'Not four!!' 'Not three!!!' 'Oh, heavens! and you propose to take a wife!' You will understand how I writhed and wriggled under the scorn.

"And then there came something worse than this,—or rather, if I remember rightly, the worst thing came first. You were over in my studio, and will remember, perhaps, some of my own abortive treasures, those melancholy but soul-inspiring creations of which I have thought so much, and others have thought so little? That no one else should value them is natural, but to me it seems unnatural, almost cruel, that any one should tell me to my face that they were valueless. Your uncle, of course, had never seen them, but he knew that sculptors are generally burdened with these 'wares,' as he called them; and he suggested that I should sell them by auction for what they might fetch,—in order that the corners which they occupy might be vacant. He thought that, perhaps, they might do for country gentlemen to stick about among their shrubs. You, knowing my foolish soreness on the subject, will understand how well I must have been prepared by this to endure your uncle's cross-examination.

"Then he asked me as to my ideas,—not art ideas, but ideas as to bread and cheese for the future. I told him as exactly as I could. I explained to him that if you were left in possession of a comfortable home, such as would have been that of your father, I should think it best for your sake to delay our marriage till I should be prepared

to do something better for you than I can at present; but that I hold myself ready to give you all that I have to give at a moment's notice, should you be required to leave his house. And, Lucy, speaking in your name, I said something further, and declared my belief that you, for my sake, would bear the inconveniences of so poor a home without complaining.

"Then there arose anger both on his side and on mine; and I must say, insult on his. He told me that I had no business to suggest that you would be expelled from his house. I replied that the threat had come, if not from him, then from Lady Tringle. Upon this he accused me of positive falsehood, asserting that your aunt had said nothing of the kind. I then referred him to Lady Tringle herself, but refused to stay any longer in the room with him, because he had insulted me.

"So you will see that I did less than nothing by my embassy. I told myself that it would be so as I descended into the underground cavern at the Gloucester Road Station. You are not to suppose that I blame him more, or, indeed, so much as I do myself. It was not to be expected that he should behave as a gentleman of fine feeling. But, perhaps, it ought to have been expected that I should behave as a man of common sense. I ought to have taken his advice about the auction, apparently, in good part. I ought not to have writhed when he scorned my poor earnings. When he asked as to my ideas, I should not have alluded to your aunt's threat as to turning you out. I should have been placid and humble; and then his want of

generous feeling would have mattered nothing. But spilt milk and broken eggs are past saving. Whatever good things may have come from your uncle's generosity had I brushed his hair for him aright, are now clean gone, seeing that I scrubbed him altogether the wrong way.

“For myself, I do not know that I should regret it very much. I have an idea that no money should be sweet to a man except that which he earns. And I have enough belief in myself to be confident that sooner or later I shall earn a sufficiency. But, dearest, I own that I feel disgusted with myself when I think that I have diminished your present comfort, or perhaps lessened for the future resources which would have been yours rather than mine. But the milk has been spilt, and now we must only think what we can best do without it. It seems to me that only two homes are possible for you,—one with Sir Thomas as his niece, and the other with me as my wife. I am conceited enough to think that you will prefer the latter even with many inconveniences. Neither can your uncle or your aunt prevent you from marrying at a very early day, should you choose to do so. There would be some preliminary ceremony, of the nature of which I am thoroughly ignorant, but which could, I suppose, be achieved in a month. I would advise you to ask your aunt boldly whether she wishes you to go or to stay with her, explaining, of course, that you intend to hold to your engagement, and explaining at the same time that you are quite ready to be married at once if she is anxious to be quit of you. That is my advice.

"And now, dear, one word of something softer! For did any lover ever write to the lady of his heart so long a letter so abominably stuffed with matters of business? How shall I best tell you how dearly I love you? Perhaps I may do it by showing you that as far as I myself am concerned I long to hear that your Aunt Emmeline and your Uncle Tom are more hard-hearted and obdurate than were ever uncle and aunt before them. I long to hear that you have been turned out into the cold, because I know that then you must come to me, though it be even less than three hundred a-year. I wish you could have seen your uncle's face as those terribly mean figures reached his ears. I do not for a moment fear that we should want. Orders come slow enough, but they come a little quicker than they did. I have never for a moment doubted my own ultimate success, and if you were with me I should be more confident than ever. Nevertheless, should your aunt bid you to stay, and should you think it right to comply with her desire, I will not complain.

"Adieu! This comes from one who is altogether happy in his confidence that at any rate before long you will have become his wife.

"ISADORE HAMEL.

"I quite expect to be scolded for my awkwardness. Indeed I shall be disappointed if I am not."

The same post which brought Hamel's long letter to Lucy brought also a short but very angry scrawl from Sir Thomas to his wife. No eyes but those of Lady Tringle saw this epistle, and no other eyes shall see it. But the

few words which it contained were full of marital wrath. Why had she threatened to turn her own niece out of his doors? Why had she subjected him to the necessity of defending her by a false assertion? Those Dormer nieces of hers were giving him an amount of trouble and annoyance which he certainly had not deserved. Lucy, though not a word was said to her of this angry letter, was conscious that something had been added to her aunt's acerbity. Indeed, for the last day or two her aunt's acerbity towards her had been much diminished. Lady Tringle had known that her husband intended to do something by which the Hamel marriage would be rendered possible; and she, though she altogether disapproved of the Hamel marriage, would be obliged to accede to it if Sir Thomas acceded to it and encouraged it by his money. Let them be married, and then, as far as the Tringles were concerned, let there be an end of these Dormer troubles for ever. To that idea Lady Tringle had reconciled herself as soon as Sir Thomas had declared his purpose, but now,—as she declared to herself,—“all the fat was again in the fire.” She received Lucy's salutations on that morning with a very bad grace.

But she had been desired to give no message, and therefore she was silent on the subject to Lucy. To the Honourable Mrs. Traffick she said a few words. “After all Ayala was not half as bad as Lucy,” said Lady Tringle.

“There, mamma, I think you are wrong,” said the Honourable Mrs. Traffick. “Of all the upsetting things I ever knew Ayala was the worst. Think of her conduct

with Septimus." Lady Tringle made a little grimace, which, however, her daughter did not see. "And then with that Marchesa!"

"That was the Marchesa's fault."

"And with Tom!"

"I don't think she was so much to blame with Tom. If she were, why doesn't she take him now she can have him? He is just as foolish about her as ever. Upon my word I think Tom will make himself ill about it."

"You haven't heard it all, mamma."

"What haven't I heard?"

"Ayala has been down with the Alburys at Stalham."

"I did hear that."

"And another man has turned up. What on earth they see in her is what I can't understand."

"Another man has offered to her! Who is he?"

"There was a Colonel Stubbs down there. Septimus heard it all from young Batsby at the club. She got this man to ride about the country with her everywhere, going to the meets with him and coming home. And in this way she got him to propose to her. I don't suppose he means anything; but that is why she won't have anything to do with Tom now. Do you mean to say she didn't do all she could to catch Tom down at Glenbogie, and then at Rome? Everybody saw it. I don't think Lucy has ever been so bad as that."

"It's quite different, my dear."

"She has come from a low father," said the Honourable Mrs. Traffick, proudly, "and therefore she has naturally

attached herself to a low young man. There is nothing to be wondered at in that. I suppose they are fond of each other, and the sooner they are married the better."

"But he can't marry her because he has got nothing."

"Papa will do something."

"That's just what your papa won't. The man has been to your father in the City and there has been ever such a row. He spoke ill of me because I endeavoured to do my duty by the ungrateful girl. I am sure I have got a lesson as to taking up other people's children. I endeavoured to do an act of charity, and see what has come of it. I don't believe in charity."

"That is wicked, mamma. Faith, Hope, and Charity! But you've got to be charitable before you begin the others."

"I don't think it is wicked. People would do best if they were made to go along on what they've got of their own." This seemed to Augusta to be a direct blow at Septimus and herself. "Of course I know what you mean, mamma."

"I didn't mean anything."

"But, if people can't stay for a few weeks in their own parents' houses, I don't know where they are to stay."

"It isn't weeks, Augusta; it's months. And as to parents, Lord Boardtrade is Mr. Traffick's parent. Why doesn't he go and stay with Lord Boardtrade?" Then Augusta got up and marched with stately step out of the room. After this it was not possible that Lucy would find much immediate grace in her aunt's eyes.

From the moment that Lucy had received her letter there came upon her the great burden of answering it. She was very anxious to do exactly as Hamel had counselled her. She was quite alive to the fact that Hamel had been imprudent in Lombard Street; but not the less was she desirous to do as he bade her,—thinking it right that a woman should obey some one, and that her obedience could be due only to him. But in order to obey him she must consult her aunt. "Aunt Emmeline," she said that afternoon, "I want to ask you something?"

"What is it now?" said Aunt Emmeline, crossly.

"About Mr. Hamel."

"I don't want to hear any more about Mr. Hamel. I have heard quite enough of Mr. Hamel."

"Of course I am engaged to him, Aunt Emmeline."

"So I hear you say. I do not think it very dutiful of you to come and talk to me about him, knowing as you do what I think about him."

"What I want to ask is this. Ought I to stay here or ought I to go away?"

"I never heard such a girl! Where are you to go to? What makes you ask the question?"

"Because you said that I ought to go if I did not give him up."

"You ought to give him up."

"I cannot do that, aunt."

"Then you had better hold your tongue and say nothing further about it. I don't believe he earns enough to give you bread to eat and decent clothes to wear. What would

you do if children were to come year after year? If you really love him I wonder how you can think of being such a millstone round a man's neck!"

This was very hard to bear. It was so different from the delicious comfort of his letter. "I do not for a moment believe that we should want." "I have never for one moment doubted my own ultimate success." But after all was there not more of truth in her aunt's words, hard and cruel as they were? And on these words, such as they were, she must find her answer to her lover; for he had bade her ask her aunt what she was to do as to staying or preparing herself for an immediate marriage. Then, before the afternoon was over, she wrote to Hamel as follows;—

"DEAR ISADORE,

"I have got ever so much to say, but I shall begin by doing as you told me in your postscript. I won't quite scold you, but I do think you might have been a little gentler with poor Uncle Tom. I do not say this because I at all regret anything which perhaps he might have done for us. If you do not want assistance from him certainly I do not. But I do think that he meant to be kind; and, though he may not be quite what you call a gentleman of fine feeling, yet he has taken me into his house when I had no other to go to, and in many respects has been generous to me. When he said that you were to go to him in Lombard Street, I am sure that he meant to be generous. And, though it has not ended well, yet he meant to be kind to both of us.

"There is what you will call my scolding; though, indeed, dearest, I do not intend to scold at all. Nor am I in the least disappointed except in regard to you. This morning I have been to Aunt Emmeline, as you desired, and I must say that she was very cross. Of course I know that it is because she is my own aunt that Uncle Tom has me here at all; and I feel that I ought to be very grateful to her. But, in spite of all that you say, laughing at Uncle Tom because he wants you to sell your grand work by auction, he is much more good-natured than Aunt Emmeline. I am quite sure my aunt never liked me, and that she will not be comfortable till I am gone. But when I asked her whether I ought to stay, or to go, she told me to hold my tongue, and say nothing further about it. Of course, by this, she meant that I was to remain, at any rate for the present.

"My own dearest, I do think this will be best, though I need not tell you how I look forward to leaving this, and being always with you. For myself I am not a bit afraid, though Aunt Emmeline said dreadful things about food and clothes, and all the rest of it. But I believe much more in what you say, that success will be sure to come. But still will it not be wise to wait a little longer? Whatever I may have to bear here, I shall think that I am bearing it for your dear sake; and then I shall be happy.

"Believe me to be always and always your own

"LUCY."

This was written and sent on a Wednesday, and nothing

further was said either by Lucy herself, or by her aunt, as to the lover, till Sir Thomas came down to Merle Park on the Saturday evening. On his arrival he seemed inclined to be gracious to the whole household, even including Mr. Traffick, who received any attention of that kind exactly as though the most amicable arrangements were always existing between him and his father-in-law. Aunt Emmeline, when it seemed that she was to encounter no further anger on account of the revelation which Hamel had made in Lombard Street, also recovered her temper, and the evening was spent as though there were no causes for serious family discord. In this spirit, on the following morning, they all went to church, and it was delightful to hear the flattering words with which Mr. Traffick praised Merle Park, and everything belonging to it, during the hour of lunch. He went so far as to make some delicately laudatory hints in praise of hospitality in general, and especially as to that so nobly exercised by London merchant-princes. Sir Thomas smiled as he heard him, and, as he smiled, he resolved that, as soon as the Christmas festivities should be over, the Honourable Septimus Traffick should certainly be turned out of that house.

After lunch there came a message to Lucy by a page-boy, who was supposed to attend generally to the personal wants of Aunt Emmeline, saying that her uncle would be glad of her attendance for a walk. "My dear," said he, have you got your thick boots on? Then go and put 'em on. We will go down to the Lodge, and then come home round by Windover Hill." She did as she was bade, and

then they started. "I want to tell you," said he, "that this Mr. Hamel of yours came to me in Lombard Street."

"I know that, Uncle Tom."

"He has written to you, then, and told you all about it?"

"He has written to me, certainly, and I have answered him."

"No doubt. Well, Lucy, I had intended to be kind to your Mr. Hamel, but, as you are probably aware, I was not enabled to carry out my intentions. He seems to be a very independent sort of young man."

"He is independent, I think."

"I have not a word to say against it. If a man can be independent it is so much the better. If a man can do everything for himself, so as to require neither to beg nor to borrow, it will be much better for him. But, my dear, you must understand that a man cannot be independent with one hand, and accept assistance with the other, at one and the same time."

"That is not his character, I am sure," said Lucy, striving to hide her indignation while she defended her lover's character.

"I do not think it is. Therefore he must remain independent, and I can do nothing for him."

"He knows that, Uncle Tom."

"Very well. Then there's an end of it. I only want to make you understand that I was willing to assist him, but that he was unwilling to be assisted. I like him all the better for it, but there must be an end of it."

"I quite understand, Uncle Tom."

"Then there's one other thing I've got to say. He accused me of having threatened to turn you out of my house. Now, my dear ——" Hereupon Lucy struggled to say a word, hardly knowing what word she ought to say, but he interrupted her,—“Just hear me out till I've done, and then there need not be another word about it. I never threatened to turn you out.”

“Not you, Uncle Tom,” she said, endeavouring to press his arm with her hand.

“If your aunt said a word in her anger you should not have made enough of it to write and tell him.”

“I thought she meant me to go, and then I didn't know whom else to ask.”

“Neither I nor she, nor anybody else, ever intended to turn you out. I have meant to be kind to you both,—to you and Ayala; and if things have gone wrong I cannot say that it has been my fault. Now, you had better stay here, and not say a word more about it till he is ready to take you. That can't be yet for a long time. He is making, at present, not more than two hundred a year. And I am sure it must be quite as much as he can do to keep a coat on his back with such an income as that. You must make up your mind to wait,—probably for some years. As I told you before, if a man chooses to have the glory of independence he must also bear the inconvenience. Now, my dear, let there be an end of this, and never say again that I want to turn you out of my house.”

CHAPTER XXXV.

TOM TRINGLE SENDS A CHALLENGE.

THE next six weeks went on tranquilly at Merle Park without a word spoken about Hamel. Sir Thomas, who was in the country as little as possible, showed his scorn to his son-in-law simply by the paucity of his words, speaking to him, when he did speak to him, with a deliberate courtesy which Mr. Traffick perfectly understood. It was that dangerous serenity which so often presages a storm. "There is something going to be up with your father," he said to Augusta. Augusta replied that she had never seen her father so civil before. "It would be a great convenience," continued the Member of Parliament, "if he could be made to hold his tongue till Parliament meets; but I'm afraid that's too good to expect." In other respects things were comfortable at Merle Park, though they were not always comfortable up in London. Tom, as the reader knows, was misbehaving himself sadly at the Mountaineers. This was the period of unlimited champagne, and of almost total absence from Lombard Street. It was seldom that Sir Thomas could get hold of his son, and when he did that broken-hearted youth would reply to his expostulations simply by asserting that if his father would induce Ayala to marry him everything should go straight in Lombard

Street. Then came the final blow. Tom was of course expected at Merle Park on Christmas Eve, but did not make his appearance either then or on Christmas Day. Christmas fell on a Wednesday, and it was intended that the family should remain in the country till the following Monday. On the Thursday Sir Thomas went up to town to make inquiries respecting his heir, as to whom Lady Tringle had then become absolutely unhappy. In London he heard the disastrous truth. Tom, in his sportive mood, had caused serious inconvenience to a most respectable policeman, and was destined to remain another week in the hands of the Philistines. Then, for a time, all the other Tringle troubles were buried and forgotten in this great trouble respecting Tom. Lady Tringle was unable to leave her room during the period of incarceration. Mr. Traffick promised to have the victim liberated by the direct interference of the Secretary of State, but failed to get anything of the kind accomplished. The girls were completely cowed by the enormity of the misfortune ; so that Tom's name was hardly mentioned except in sad and confidential whispers. But of all the sufferers Sir Thomas suffered the most. To him it was a positive disgrace, weighing down every moment of his life. At Travers and Treason he could not hold up his head boldly and open his mouth loudly as had always been his wont. At Travers and Treason there was not a clerk who did not know that "the governor" was an altered man since this misfortune had happened to the hope of the firm. What passed between Sir Thomas and his son on the occasion has already been

told in a previous chapter. That Sir Thomas, on the whole, behaved with indulgence must be acknowledged; but he felt that his son must in truth absent himself from Lombard Street for a time.

Tom had been advised by his father to go forth and see the world. A prolonged tour had been proposed to him which to most young men might seem to have great attraction. To him it would have had attraction enough, had it not been for Ayala. There would have been hardly any limit to the allowance made to him, and he would have gone forth armed with introductions, which would have made every port a happy home to him. But as soon as the tour was suggested he resolved at once that he could not move himself to a distance from Ayala. What he expected,—what he even hoped,—he could not tell himself. But while Ayala was in London, and Ayala was unmarried, he could not be made to take himself far away.

He was thoroughly ashamed of himself. He was not at all the man who could bear a week of imprisonment and not think himself disgraced. For a day or two he shut himself up altogether in his lodgings, and never once showed himself at the Mountaineers. Faddle came to him, but he snubbed Faddle at first, remembering all the severe things his father had said about the Faddles in general. But he soon allowed that feeling to die away when the choice seemed to be between Faddle and solitude. Then he crept out in the dark and ate his dinners with Faddle at some tavern, generally paying the bill for both of them. After dinner he would play half-a-dozen games of billiards with

his friend at some unknown billiard-room, and then creep home to his lodgings,—a blighted human being!

At last, about the end of the first week in January, he was induced to go down to Merle Park. There Mr. and Mrs. Traffick were still sojourning, the real grief which had afflicted Sir Thomas having caused him to postpone his intention in regard to his son-in-law. At Merle Park Tom was cosseted and spoilt by the women very injudiciously. It was not perhaps the fact that they regarded him as a hero simply because he had punched a policeman in the stomach and then been locked up in vindication of the injured laws of his country; but that incident in combination with his unhappy love did seem to make him heroic. Even Lucy regarded him with favour because of his constancy to her sister; whereas the other ladies measured their admiration for his persistency by the warmth of their anger against the silly girl who was causing so much trouble. His mother told him over and over again that his cousin was not worth his regard; but then, when he would throw himself on the sofa in an agony of despair,—weakened perhaps as much by the course of champagne as by the course of his love,—then she, too, would bid him hope; and at last promised that she herself would endeavour to persuade Ayala to look at the matter in a more favourable light. “It would all be right if it were not for that accursed Stubbs,” poor Tom would say to his mother. “The man whom I called my friend! The man I lent a horse to when he couldn’t get one anywhere else! The man to whom I confided everything, even about the necklace! If it hadn’t been for Stubbs I

never should have hurt that policeman! When I was striking him I thought that it was Stubbs!" Then the mother would heap feminine maledictions on the poor Colonel's head, and so together they would weep and think of revenge.

From the moment Tom had heard Colonel Stubbs's name mentioned as that of his rival he had meditated revenge. It was quite true when he said that he had been thinking of Stubbs when he struck the policeman. He had consumed the period of his confinement in gnashing his teeth, all in regard to our poor friend Jonathan. He told his father that he could not go upon his long tour because of Ayala. But in truth his love was now so mixed up with ideas of vengeance that he did not himself know which prevailed. If he could first have slaughtered Stubbs then perhaps he might have started! But how was he to slaughter Stubbs? Various ideas occurred to his mind. At first he thought that he would go down to Aldershot with the biggest cutting-whip he could find in any shop in Piccadilly; but then it occurred to him that at Aldershot he would have all the British army against him, and that the British army might do something to him worse even than the London magistrate. Then he would wait till the Colonel could be met elsewhere. He ascertained that the Colonel was still at Stalham, where he had passed the Christmas, and he thought how it might be if he were to attack the Colonel in the presence of his friends, the Alburys. He assured himself that, as far as personal injury went, he feared nothing. He had no disinclination to be

hit over the head himself, if he could be sure of hitting the Colonel over the head. If it could be managed that they two should fly at each other with their fists, and be allowed to do the worst they could to each other for an hour, without interference, he would be quite satisfied. But down at Stalham that would not be allowed. All the world would be against him, and nobody there to see that he got fair play. If he could encounter the man in the streets of London it would be better; but were he to seek the man down at Stalham he would probably find himself in the County Lunatic Asylum. What must he do for his revenge? He was surely entitled to it. By all the laws of chivalry, as to which he had his own ideas, he had a right to inflict an injury upon a successful—even upon an unsuccessful—rival. Was it not a shame that so excellent an institution as duelling should have been stamped out? Wandering about the lawns and shrubberies at Merle Park he thought of all this, and at last he came to a resolution.

The institution had been stamped out, as far as Great Britain was concerned. He was aware of that. But it seemed to him that it had not been stamped out in other more generous countries. He had happened to notice that a certain enthusiastic politician in France had enjoyed many duels, and had never been severely repressed by the laws of his country. Newspaper writers were always fighting in France, and were never guillotined. The idea of being hanged was horrible to him,—so distasteful that he saw at a glance that a duel in England was out of the question. But to have his head cut off, even if it should come to that,

would be a much less affair. But in Belgium, in Italy, in Germany, they never did cut off the heads of the very numerous gentlemen who fought duels. And there were the Southern States of the American Union, where he fancied that men might fight duels just as they pleased. He would be ready to go even to New Orleans at a day's notice if only he could induce Colonel Stubbs to meet him there. And he thought that, if Colonel Stubbs really possessed half the spirit which seemed to be attributed to him by the British army generally, he would come, if properly invoked, and fight such a duel as this, whether at New Orleans or at some other well-chosen blood-allowing spot on the world's surface. Tom was prepared to go anywhere for blood.

But the invocation must be properly made. When he had wanted another letter of another kind to be written for him, the Colonel himself was the man to whom he had gone for assistance. And, had his present enemy been any other than the Colonel himself, he would have gone to the Colonel in preference to any one else for aid in this matter. There was no one, in truth, in whom he believed so thoroughly as in the Colonel. But that was out of the question. Then he reflected what friend might now stand him in stead. He would have gone to Houston, who wanted to marry his sister; but Houston seemed to have disappeared, and he did not know where he might be found. There was his brother-in-law, Traffick,—but he feared lest Traffick might give him over once more into the hands of the police. He thought of Hamel, as being in a way connected

with the family; but he had seen so little of Hamel, and had so much disliked what he had seen, that he was obliged to let that hope go by. There was no one left but Faddle whom he could trust. Faddle would do anything he was told to do. Faddle would carry the letter, no doubt, or allow himself to be named as a proposed second. But Faddle could not write the letter. He felt that he could write the letter himself better than Faddle.

He went up to town, having sent a mysterious letter to Faddle, bidding his friend attend him in his lodgings. He did not yet dare to go to the Mountaineers, where Faddle would have been found. But Faddle came, true to the appointment. "What is it, now?" said the faithful friend. "I hope you are going back to Travers and Treasons'. That is what I should do, and walk in just as though nothing had happened."

"Not if you were me, you wouldn't."

"That does make a difference, of course."

"There is something else to be done before I can again darken the doors of Travers and Treason,—if I should ever do so!"

"Something particular?"

"Something very particular. Faddle, I do think you are a true friend."

"You may say that. I have stuck to you always,—though you don't know the kind of things my people say to me about it. They say I am going to ruin myself because of you. The governor threatened to put me out of the business altogether. But I'm a man who will be true to

my friend, whatever happens. I think you have been a little cool to me, lately; but even that don't matter."

"Cool! If you knew the state that I'm in you wouldn't talk of a fellow being cool! I'm so knocked about it all that I don't know what I'm doing."

"I do take that into consideration."

"Now, I'll tell you what I am going to do." Then he stood still, and looked Faddle full in the face. Faddle, sitting awe-struck on his chair, returned the gaze. He knew that a moment of supreme importance was at hand. "Faddle, I'll shoot that fellow down like a dog."

"Will you, indeed?"

"Like a dog;—if I can get at him. I should have no more compunction in taking his life than a mere worm. Why should I, when I know that he has sapped the very juice of my existence?"

"Do you mean,—do you mean,—that you would—murder him?"

"It would not be murder. Of course it might be that he would shoot me instead. Upon the whole, I think I should like that best."

"Oh; a duel!" said Faddle.

"That's what I mean. Murder him! Certainly not. Though I should like nothing half so well as to thrash him within an inch of his life. I would not murder him. My plan is this,—I shall write to him a letter inviting him to meet me in any corner of the globe that he may select. Torrid zone or Arctic circle will be all the same to me. You will have to accompany me as my second." Faddle

shivered with excitement and dread of coming events. Among other ideas there came the thought that it might be difficult to get back from the Arctic circle without money if his friend Tom should happen to be shot dead in that locality. "But first of all," continued Tom, "you will have to carry a letter."

"To the Colonel?" suggested Faddle.

"Of course. The man is now staying with friends of his named Albury at a place called Stalham. From what I hear they are howling swells. Sir Harry Albury is Master of the Hounds, and Lady Albury when she is up in London has all the Royal Family constantly at her parties. Stubbs is a cousin of his; but you must go right away up to him among 'em all, and deliver the letter into his hands without minding 'em a bit."

"Couldn't it go by post?"

"No; this kind of letter musn't go by post. You have to be able to swear that you delivered it yourself into his own hands. And then you must wait for an answer. Even though he should want a day to think of it, you must wait."

"Where am I to stay, Tom?"

"Well; it may be they'll ask you to the house, because, though you carry the letter for me, you are not supposed to be his enemy. If so, put a jolly face on it, and enjoy yourself as well as you can. You must seem, you know, to be just as big a swell as anybody there. But if they don't ask you, you must go to the nearest inn. I'll pay the bill."

"Shall I go to-day?" asked Faddle.

“ I’ve got to write the letter first. It’ll take a little time, so that you’d better put it off till to-morrow. If you will leave me now I’ll write it, and if you will come back at six we’ll go and have a bit of dinner at Bolivia’s.” This was an eating-house in the neighbourhood of Leicester Square, to which the friends had become partial during this troubled period of their existence.

“ Why not come to the Mountaineers, old boy?” Tom shook his head, showing that he was not yet up to such festivity as that; and then Faddle took his departure.

Tom at once got out his pen and paper, and began to write his letter. It may be imagined that it was not written off-hand, or without many struggles. When it was written it ran as follows ;—

“ SIR,

“ You will not, I think, be surprised to hear from me in anything but a friendly spirit. I went down to you at Aldershot as to a friend whom I could trust with my bosom’s dearest secret, and you have betrayed me. I told you of my love, a love which has long burned in my heart, and you received my confidence with a smile, knowing all the time that you were my rival. I leave it to you to say what reply you can make as to conduct so damning, so unmanly, so dastardly,—and so very unlike a friend as this!

“ However, there is no place here for words. You have offered me the greatest insult and the greatest injury which one man can inflict upon another! There is no possibility of an apology, unless you are inclined to say that you will renounce for ever your claim upon the hand of Miss Ayala Dormer. This I do not expect, and, therefore, I call upon

you to give me that satisfaction which is all that one gentleman can offer to another. After the injury you have done me I think it quite impossible that you should refuse.

“Of course, I know that duels cannot be fought in England because of the law. I am sorry that the law should have been altered, because it allows so many cowards to escape the punishment they deserve.” Tom, as he wrote this, was very proud of the keenness of the allusion. “I am quite sure, however, that a man who bears the colours of a colonel in the British army will not try to get off by such a pretext.” He was proud, too, about the colours. “France, Belgium, Italy, the United States, and all the world, are open! I will meet you wherever you may choose to arrange a meeting. I presume that you will prefer pistols.

“I send this by the hands of my friend, Mr. Faddle, who will be prepared to make arrangements with you, or with any friend on your behalf. He will bring back your reply, which no doubt will be satisfactory.—I am, Sir, your most obedient servant,

“THOMAS TRINGLE, junior.”

When, after making various copies, Tom at last read the letter as finally prepared, he was much pleased with it, doubting whether the Colonel himself could have written it better, had the task been confided to his hands. When Faddle came, he read it to him with much pride, and then committed it to his custody. After that they went out and ate their dinner at Bolivia's with much satisfaction, but still with a bearing of deep melancholy, as was proper on such an occasion.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

TOM TRINGLE GETS AN ANSWER.

FADDLE as he went down into the country made up his mind that the law which required such letters to be delivered by hand was an absurd law. The post would have done just as well, and would have saved a great deal of trouble. These gloomy thoughts were occasioned by a conviction that he could not carry himself easily or make himself happy among such "howling swells" as these Alburys. If they should invite him to the house the matter would be worse that way than the other. He had no confidence in his dress coat, which he was aware had been damaged by nocturnal orgies. It is all very well to tell a fellow to be as "big a swell" as anybody else, as Tom had told him. But Faddle acknowledged to himself the difficulty of acting up to such advice. Even the eyes of Colonel Stubbs turned upon him after receipt of the letter would oppress him.

Nevertheless he must do his best, and he took a gig at the station nearest to Albury. He was careful to carry his bag with him, but still he lived in hope that he would be able to return to London the same day. When he found himself within the lodges of Stalham Park he could hardly keep himself from shivering, and, when he asked the footman at the door whether Colonel Stubbs were there, he longed to be told that Colonel Stubbs had gone away on the previous day to some—he did not care what—distant

part of the globe. But Colonel Stubbs had not gone away. Colonel Stubbs was in the house.

Our friend the Colonel had not suffered as Tom had suffered since his rejection;—but nevertheless he had been much concerned. He had set his heart upon Ayala before he had asked her, and could not bring himself to change his heart because she had refused him. He had gone down to Aldershot and had performed his duties, abstaining for the present from repeating his offer. The offer of course must be repeated, but as to the when, the where, and the how, he had not as yet made up his mind. Then Tom Tringle had come to him at Aldershot communicating to him the fact that he had a rival;—and also the other fact that the other rival like himself had hitherto been unsuccessful. It seemed improbable to him that such a girl as Ayala should attach herself to such a man as her cousin Tom. But nevertheless he was uneasy. He regarded Tom Tringle as a miracle of wealth, and felt certain that the united efforts of the whole family would be used to arrange the match. Ayala had refused him also, and therefore, up to the present moment, the chances of the other man were no better than his own. When Tom left him at Aldershot he hardly remembered that Tom knew nothing of his secret, whereas Tom had communicated to him his own. It never for a moment occurred to him that Tom would quarrel with him; although he had seen that the poor fellow had been disgusted because he had refused to write the letter.

On Christmas Eve he had gone down to Stalham, and there he had remained discussing the matter of his love

with Lady Albury. To no one else in the house had the affair been mentioned, and by Sir Harry he was supposed to remain there only for the sake of the hunting. With Sir Harry he was of all guests the most popular, and thus it came to pass that his prolonged presence at Stalham was not matter of special remark. Much of his time he did devote to hunting, but there were half hours devoted in company with Lady Albury to Ayala's perfection and Ayala's obstinacy.

Lady Albury was almost inclined to think that Ayala should be given up. Married ladies seldom estimate even the girls they like best at their full value. It seems to such a one as Lady Albury almost a pity that such a one as Colonel Stubbs should waste his energy upon anything so insignificant as Ayala Dormer. The speciality of the attraction is of course absent to the woman, and unless she has considered the matter so far as to be able to clothe her thoughts in male vestments, as some women do, she cannot understand the longing that is felt for so small a treasure. Lady Albury thought that young ladies were very well, and that Ayala was very well among young ladies; but Ayala in getting Colonel Stubbs for a husband would, as Lady Albury thought, have received so much more than her desert that she was now almost inclined to be angry with the Colonel. "My dear friend," he said to her one day, "you might as well take it for granted. I shall go after my princess with all the energy which a princess merits."

"The question is whether she be a princess," said Lady Albury.

"Allow me to say that that is a point on which I cannot admit a doubt. She is a princess to me, and just at present I must be regarded as the only judge in the matter."

"She shall be a goddess, if you please," said Lady Albury.

"Goddess, princess, pink, or pearl;—any name you please supposed to convey perfection shall be the same to me. It may be that she is in truth no better, or more lovely, or divine, than many another young lady who is at the present moment exercising the heart of many another gentleman. You know enough of the world to be aware that every Jack has his Gill. She is my Gill, and that's an end of it."

"I hope then that she may be your Gill."

"And, in order that she may, you must have her here again. I should absolutely not know how to go to work were I to find myself in the presence of Aunt Dosett in Kingsbury Crescent." In answer to this Lady Albury assured him that she would be quite willing to have the girl again at Stalham if it could be managed. She was reminding him, however, how difficult it had been on a previous occasion to overcome the scruples of Mrs. Dosett, when a servant brought in word to Colonel Stubbs that there was a man in the hall desirous of seeing him immediately on particular business. Then the servant presented our friend Faddle's card.

MR. SAMUEL FADDLE,

1, Badminton Gardens.

"Yes, Sir;" said the servant. "He says he has a letter which he must put into your own particular hands."

"That looks like a bailiff," said Lady Albury, laughing. Colonel Stubbs, declaring that he had no special reason to be afraid of any bailiff, left the room and went down into the hall.

At Stalham the real hall of the house was used as a billiard-room, and here, leaning against the billiard table, the Colonel found poor Faddle. When a man is compelled by some chance circumstance to address another man whom he does not know, and whom by inspection he feels he shall never wish to know, he always hardens his face, and sometimes also his voice. So it was with the Colonel when he looked at Faddle. A word he did say, not in words absolutely uncivil, as to the nature of the business in hand. Then Faddle, showing his emotion by a quaver in his voice, suggested that as the matter was one of extreme delicacy some more private apartment might be provided. Upon this Stubbs led the way into a little room which was for the most part filled with hunting-gear, and offered the stranger one of the three chairs which it contained. Faddle sat down, finding himself so compelled, though the Colonel still remained standing, and then extracted the fatal epistle from his pocket. "Colonel Stubbs," said he, handing up the missive, "I am directed by my friend, Mr. Thomas Tringle, junior, to put this letter into your own hand. When you have read it I shall be ready to consult with you as to its contents." These few words he had learnt by heart on his journey down, having practised them continually.

The Colonel took the letter, and turning to the window read it with his back to the visitor. He read it twice from beginning to end in order that he might have time to resolve whether he would laugh aloud at both Faddle and Tringle, or whether it might not be better to endeavour to soften the anger of poor Tom by a message which should be at any rate kindly worded. "This is from my friend, Tom Tringle," he said.

"From Mr. Thomas Tringle, junior," said Faddle, proudly.

"So I perceive. I am sorry to think that he should be in so much trouble. He is one of the best fellows I know, and I am really grieved that he should be unhappy. This, you know, is all nonsense."

"It is not nonsense at all, Colonel Stubbs."

"You must allow me to be the judge of that, Mr. Faddle. It is at any rate nonsense to me. He wants me to go somewhere and fight a duel,—which I should not do with any man under any circumstances. Here there is no possible ground for any quarrel whatsoever,—as I will endeavour to explain, myself, to my friend, Mr. Tringle. I shall be sure to write to him at once,—and so I will bid you good afternoon."

But this did not at all suit poor Faddle after so long a journey. "I thought it probable that you would write, Colonel Stubbs, and therefore I am prepared to wait. If I cannot be accommodated here I will wait,—will wait elsewhere."

"That will not be at all necessary. We have a post to London twice a day."

"You must be aware, Colonel Stubbs, that letters of this sort should not be sent by post."

"The kind of letter I shall write may be sent by post very well. It will not be bellicose, and therefore there can be no objection."

"I really think, Colonel Stubbs, that you are making very little of a very serious matter."

"Mr. Faddle, I really must manage my own affairs after my own way. Would you like a glass of sherry? If not, I need hardly ask you to stay here any longer." Upon that he went out into the billiard-room and rang the bell. Poor Faddle would have liked the glass of sherry, but he felt that it would be incompatible with the angry dignity which he assumed, and he left the house without another word or even a gesture of courtesy. Then he returned to London, having taken his bag and dress coat all the way to Stalham for nothing.

Tom's letter was almost too good to be lost, but there was no one to whom the joke could be made known except Lady Albury. She, he was sure, would keep poor Tom's secret as well as his own, and to her he showed the letter. "I pity him from the bottom of my heart," he said. Lady Albury declared that the writer of such a letter was too absurd for pity. "Not at all. Unless he really loved her he wouldn't have been so enraged. I suppose he does think that I injured him. He did tell me his story, and I didn't tell him mine. I can understand it all, though I didn't imagine he was such a fool as to invite me to travel all round the world because of the harsh laws of Great

Britain. Nevertheless, I shall write to him quite an affectionate letter, remembering that, should I succeed myself, he will be my first cousin by marriage."

Before he went to bed that night he wrote his letter, and the reader may as well see the whole correspondence;—

"MY DEAR TRINGLE,

"If you will think of it all round you will see that you have got no cause of quarrel with me any more than I have with you. If it be the case that we are both attached to your cousin, we must abide her decision whether it be in favour of either of us, or, as may be too probably the case, equally adverse to both of us. If I understand your letter rightly, you think that I behaved unfairly when I did not tell you of my own affairs upon hearing yours from your own lips. Why should I? Why should I have been held to be constrained to tell my secret because you, for your own sake, had told me yours? Had I been engaged to your cousin,—which I regret to say is very far from the case,—I should have told you, naturally. I should have regarded the matter as settled, and should have acquainted you with a fact which would have concerned you. But as such was not a fact, I was by no means bound to tell you how my affairs stood. This ought to be clear to you, and I hope will be when you have read what I say.

"I may as well go on to declare that under no circumstances should I fight a duel with you. If I thought I had done wrong in the matter I would beg your pardon. I

can't do that as it is,—though I am most anxious to appease you,—because I have done you no wrong.

“Pray forget your animosity,—which is in truth unfounded,—and let us be friends as we were before.

“Yours very sincerely, JONATHAN STUBBS.”

Faddle reached London the evening before the Colonel's letter, and again dined with his friend at Bolivia's. At first they were both extremely angry, acerbating each other's wrath. Now that he was safe back in London Faddle thought that he would have enjoyed an evening among the “swells” of Stalham, and felt himself to be injured by the inhospitable treatment he had received—“after going all the way down there, hardly to be asked to sit down!”

“Not asked to sit down!”

“Well, yes, I was;—on a miserable cane-bottomed chair in a sort of cupboard. And he didn't sit down. You may call them swells, but I think your Colonel Stubbs is a very vulgar sort of fellow. When I told him the post isn't the proper thing for such a letter, he only laughed. I suppose he doesn't know what is the kind of thing among gentlemen.”

“I should think he does know,” said Tom.

“Then why doesn't he act accordingly? Would you believe it; he never so much as asked me whether I had a mouth on. It was just luncheon time, too.”

“I suppose they lunch late.”

“They might have asked me. I shouldn't have taken it. He did say something about a glass of sherry, but it

was in that sort of tone which tells a fellow that he is expected not to take it. And then he pretended to laugh. I could see that he was shaking in his shoes at the idea of having to fight. He go to the torrid zone! He would much rather go to a police office if he thought that there was any fighting on hand. I should dust his jacket with a stick if I were you."

Later on in the evening Tom declared that this was what he would do, but, before he came to that, a third bottle of Signor Bolivia's champagne had been made to appear. The evening passed between them not without much enjoyment. On the opening of that third cork the wine was declared to be less excellent than what had gone before, and Signor Bolivia was evoked in person. A gentleman named Walker, who looked after the establishment, made his appearance, and with many smiles, having been induced to swallow a bumper of the compound himself, declared, with a knowing shake of the head and an astute twinkle of the eye, that the wine was not equal to the last. He took a great deal of trouble, he assured them, to import an article which could not be surpassed, if it could be equalled, in London, always visiting Epernay himself once a-year for the purpose of going through the wine-vaults. Let him do what he would an inferior bottle,—or, rather, a bottle somewhat inferior,—would sometimes make its way into his cellar. Would Mr. Tringle let him have the honour of drawing another cork, so that the exact amount of difference might be ascertained? Tom gave his sanction; the fourth cork was drawn; and Mr. Walker, sitting

down and consuming the wine with his customers, was enabled to point out to a hair's breadth the nature and the extent of the variation. Tringle still thought that the difference was considerable. Faddle was, on the whole, inclined to agree with Signor Bolivia. It need hardly be said that the four bottles were paid for,—or rather scored against Tringle, who at the present time had a little account at the establishment.

“Show a fellar fellar's letters morrer.” Such or something like it was Faddle's last request to his friend as they bade each other farewell for the night in Pall Mall. But Faddle was never destined to see the Colonel's epistle. On his attempting to let himself in at Badminton Gardens, he was kidnapped by his father in his night-shirt and dressing-gown; and was sent out of London on the following morning by long sea down to Aberdeen, whither he was intrusted to the charge of a stern uncle. Our friend Tom saw nothing more of his faithful friend till years had rolled over both their heads.

By the morning post, while Tom was still lying sick with headache,—for even with Signor Bolivia's wine the pulling of many corks is apt to be dangerous,—there came the letter from the Colonel. Bad as Tom was, he felt himself constrained to read it at once, and learned that neither the Torrid zone or Arctic circle would require his immediate attendance. He was very sick, and perhaps, therefore, less high in courage than on the few previous days. Partly, perhaps, from that cause, but partly, also, from the Colonel's logic, he did find that his wrath was somewhat abated. Not but what it was still present to his mind that if two men

loved the same girl as ardently, as desperately, as eternally as he loved Ayala, the best thing for them would be to be put together like the Kilkenny cats, till whatever remnant should be left of one might have its chance with the young lady. He still thought that it would be well that they should fight to the death, but a glimmering of light fell upon his mind as to the Colonel's abnegation of all treason in the matter. "I suppose it wasn't to be expected that he should tell," he said to himself. "Perhaps I shouldn't have told in the same place. But as to forgetting animosity that is out of the question! How is a man to forget his animosity when two men want to marry the same girl?"

About three o'clock on that day he dressed himself, and sat waiting for Faddle to come to him. He knew how anxious his friend would be to see the Colonel's letter. But Faddle by this time had passed the Nore, and had added sea-sickness to his other maladies. Faddle came to him no more, and the tedious hours of the afternoon wore themselves away in his lodgings till he found his solitude to be almost more unbearable than his previous misfortunes. At last came the time when he must go out for his dinner. He did not dare to attempt the Mountaineers. And as for Bolivia, Bolivia with his corks, and his eating-house, and his vintages, was abominable to him. About eight o'clock he slunk into a quiet little house on the north side of Oxford Street, and there had two mutton chops, some buttered toast, and some tea. As he drank his tea he told himself that on the morrow he would go back to his mother at Merle Park, and get from her such consolation as might be possible.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

GERTRUDE IS UNSUCCESSFUL.

IT was now the middle of January, and Gertrude Tringle had received no reply from her lover to the overture which she had made him. Nor, indeed, had she received any letter from him since that to which this overture had been a reply. It was now two months since her proposition had been made, and during that time her anger had waxed very hot against Mr. Houston. After all, it might be a question whether Mr. Houston was worth all the trouble which she, with her hundred thousand pounds, was taking on his behalf. She did not like the idea of abandoning him, because, by doing so, she would seem to yield to her father. Having had a young man of her own, it behoved her to stick to her young man in spite of her parents. But what is a girl to do with a lover who, at the end of two months, has made no reply to an offer from herself that he should run away with her, and take her to Ostend? She was in this frame of mind when, lo and behold, she found her own letter, still inclosed in her own envelope,—but opened, and thrust in amongst some of her father's papers. It was evident enough that the letter had never passed from out of the house. There had been treachery on the part of some servant;—or perhaps her father might have condescended

to search the little box;—or, more probable still, Augusta had betrayed her! Then she reflected that she had communicated her purpose to her sister, that her sister had abstained from any questions since the letter had been written, and that her sister, therefore, no doubt, was the culprit. There, however, was the letter, which had never reached her lover's hands, and, as a matter of course, her affections returned with all their full ardour to the unfortunate ill-used man. That her conduct was now watched would, she thought, be a matter of course. Her father knew her purpose, and, like stern parents in general, would use all his energies to thwart it. Sir Thomas had, in truth, thought but little about the matter since he had first thrust the letter away. Tom's troubles, and the disgrace brought by them upon Travers and Treason generally, had so occupied his mind that he cared but little for Gertrude and her lover. But Gertrude had no doubt that she was closely watched, and in these circumstances was driven to think how she could best use her wits so as to countermine her father. To run away from Queen's Gate would, she thought, be more difficult, and more uncomfortable, than to perform the same operation at Merle Park. It was intended that the family should remain in the country, at any rate, till Easter, and Gertrude resolved that there might yet be time for another effort before Easter should be past, if only she could avoid those hundred Argus eyes, which were, no doubt, fixed upon her from all sides.

She prepared another letter to her lover, which she addressed to him at his club in London. In this she told

him nothing of her former project, except that a letter written by her in November had fallen into the hands of enemies. Then she gave him to understand that there was need of the utmost caution ; but that, if adequate caution were used, she did not doubt they might succeed. She said nothing about her great project, but suggested to him that he should run down into Sussex, and meet her at a certain spot indicated, outside the Park-palings, half-an-hour after dusk. It might be, she said, impossible that the meeting should be effected, but she thought that she could so manage as to leave the house unwatched at the appointed hour. With the object of being especially safe she began and concluded her letter without any names, and then managed to deposit it herself in the box of the village post-office.

Houston, when he received this letter, at once made up his mind that he would not be found on the outer side of the Park-palings on the evening named. He told himself that he was too old for the romance of love-making, and that should he be received, when hanging about in the dark, by some custodian with a cudgel, he would have nothing to thank but his own folly. He wrote back therefore to say that he regarded the outside of the Park-palings as indiscreet, but that he would walk up through the lodge-gate to the house at three o'clock in the afternoon of the day named, and he would take it as an additional mark of her favour if she would meet him on the road. Gertrude had sent him a mysterious address ; he was to direct the letter to " O. P. Q., Post Office, Hastings," and she was prepared to hire a country boy to act as Love's messenger

on the occasion. But of this instruction Frank took no notice, addressing the letter to Merle Park in the usual way.

Gertrude received her letter without notice from any one. On that occasion Argus, with all his eyes, was by chance asleep. She was very angry with her lover,—almost determined to reject him altogether, almost disposed to yield to her angry parents and look out for some other lover who might be accepted in better part; but still, when the day came she put on her hat and walked down the road towards the lodge.

As Fortune had it,—Fortune altogether unfavourable to those perils for which her soul was longing,—no one watched her, no one dogged her steps, no one took any notice of her, till she met Frank Houston when he had passed about a hundred yards on through the gates. “And so you have come,” she said.

“Oh, yes; I have come. I was sure to come when I said so. No man is more punctual than I am in these matters. I should have come before,—only I did not get your letter.”

“Oh, Frank!”

“Well, my darling. You are looking uncommonly well, and I am so glad to see you. How are they all?”

“Frank!”

“What is it?”

“Oh, Frank, what are we to do?”

“The governor will give way at last, I should say.”

“Never;—that is while we are as we are now. If we were married ——”

"Ah,—I wish we were! Wouldn't it be nice?"

"Do you really think so?"

"Of course I do. I'm ready to-morrow for the matter of that."

"But could you do something great?"

"Something great! As to earning my bread, you mean? I do not think I could do that. I didn't turn my hand to it early enough."

"I wasn't thinking of—your bread."

"You said,—could I do something great?"

"Frank, I wrote you a letter and described it all. How I got the courage to do it I do not know. I feel as though I could not bring myself to say it now. I wonder whether you would have the courage."

"I should say so. I don't know quite what sort of thing it is; but I generally have pluck enough for anything in a common way."

"This is something in an uncommon way."

"I couldn't break open Travers and Treason, and get at the safe, or anything in that way."

"It is another sort of safe of which you must break the lock, Frank; another treasure you must steal. Do you not understand me?"

"Not in the least."

"There is Tom," said Gertrude. "He is always wandering about the place now like a ghost. Let us go back to the gate." Then Frank turned. "You heard, I suppose, of that dreadful affair about the policeman."

"There was a row, I was told."

"Did you feel that the family were disgraced?"

"Not in the least. He had to pay five shillings,—hadn't he,—for telling a policeman to go about his business?"

"He was—locked up," said Gertrude, solemnly.

"It's just the same. Nobody thinks anything about that kind of thing. Now, what is it I have got to do? We had better turn back again as soon as we can, because I must go up to the house before I go."

"You will?"

"Certainly. I will not leave it to your father to say that I came skulking about the place, and was ashamed to show my face. That would not be the way to make him give you your money."

"I am sure he'd give it,—if we were once married."

"If we were married without having it assured before hand we should look very blue if things went wrong afterwards."

"I asked you whether you had courage."

"Courage enough, I think, when my body is concerned; but I am an awful coward in regard to money. I wouldn't mind hashed mutton and baked potatoes for myself, but I shouldn't like to see you eating them, dearest, after all the luxuries to which you have been accustomed."

"I should think nothing of it."

"Did you ever try? I never came absolutely to hashed mutton, but I've known how very uncomfortable it is not to be able to pay for the hot joints. I'm willing to own honestly that married life without an income would not have attractions for me."

"But if it was sure to come?"

"Ah, then indeed,—with you! I have just said how nice it would be."

"Have you ever been at Ostend?" she asked, suddenly.

"Ostend. Oh, yes. There was a man there who used to cheat horribly at *écarté*. He did me out of nearly a hundred pounds one night."

"But there's a clergyman there, I'm told."

"I don't think this man was in orders. But he might have been. Parsons come out in so many shapes! This man called himself a count. It was seven years ago."

"I am speaking of to-day."

"I've not been there since."

"Would you like to go there,—with me?"

"It isn't a nice sort of place, I should say, for a honeymoon. But you shall choose. When we are married you shall go where you like."

"To be married!" she exclaimed.

"Married at Ostend! Would your mother like that?"

"Mother! Oh, dear!"

"I'll be shot if I know what you're after, Gertrude. If you've got anything to say you'd better speak out. I want to go up to the house now."

They had now taken one or two turns between the lodge and a point in the road from which the house could be observed, and at which Tom could still be seen wandering about, thinking no doubt of Ayala. Here Frank stopped as though determined not to turn to the lodge again. It was wonderful to Gertrude that he should not have under-

stood what she had already said. When he talked of her mother going with them to the Ostend marriage she was almost beside herself. This lover of hers was a man of the world and must have heard of elopements. But now had come a time in which she must be plain, unless she made up her mind to abandon her plan altogether. "Frank," she said, "if you were to run away with me, then we could be married at Ostend."

"Run away with you!"

"It wouldn't be the first time that such a thing has been done."

"The commonest thing in the world, my dear, when a girl has got her money in her own hands. Nothing I should like so much."

"Money! It's always money. It's nothing but the money, I believe."

"That's unkind, Gertrude."

"Ain't you unkind? You won't do anything I ask."

"My darling, that hashed mutton and those baked potatoes are too clear before my eyes."

"You think of nothing, I believe, but your dinner."

"I think, unfortunately, of a great many other things. Hashed mutton is simply symbolical. Under the head of hashed mutton I include poor lodgings, growlers when we get ourselves asked to eat a dinner at somebody's table, limited washing-bills, table-napkins rolled up in their dirt every day for a week, antimacassars to save the backs of the chairs, a picture of you darning my socks while I am reading a newspaper hired at a halfpenny from the public-

house round the corner, a pint of beer in the pewter between us,—and perhaps two babies in one cradle because we can't afford to buy a second."

"Don't, Sir."

"In such an emergency I am bound to give you the advantage both of my experience and imagination."

"Experience!"

"Not about the cradles! That is imagination. My darling, it won't do. You and I have not been brought up to make ourselves happy on a very limited income."

"Papa would be sure to give us the money," she said, eagerly.

"In such a matter as this, where your happiness is concerned, my dear, I will trust no one."

"My happiness!"

"Yes, my dear, your happiness! I am quite willing to own the truth. I am not fitted to make you happy, if I were put upon the hashed mutton régime as I have described to you. I will not run the risk,—for your sake."

"For your own, you mean," she said.

"Nor for my own, if you wish me to add that also."

Then they walked up towards the house for some little way in silence. "What is it you intend, then?" she asked.

"I will ask your father once again."

"He will simply turn you out of the house," she said. Upon this he shrugged his shoulders, and they walked on to the hall-door in silence.

Sir Thomas was not at Merle Park, nor was he expected

home that evening. Frank Houston could only therefore ask for Lady Tringle, and her he saw together with Mr. and Mrs. Traffick. In presence of them all nothing could be said of love affairs; and, after sitting for half-an-hour, during which he was not entertained with much cordiality, he took his leave, saying that he would do himself the honour of calling on Sir Thomas in the City. While he was in the drawing-room Gertrude did not appear. She had retired to her room, and was there resolving that Frank Houston was not such a lover as would justify a girl in breaking her heart for him.

And Frank as he went to town brought his mind to the same way of thinking. The girl wanted something romantic to be done, and he was not disposed to do anything romantic for her. He was not in the least angry with her, acknowledging to himself that she had quite as much a right to her way of looking at things as he had to his. But he felt almost sure that the Tringle alliance must be regarded as impossible. If so, should he look out for another heiress, or endeavour to enjoy life, stretching out his little income as far as might be possible;—or should he assume altogether a new character, make a hero of himself, and ask Imogene Docimer to share with him a little cottage, in whatever might be the cheapest spot to be found in the civilised parts of Europe? If it was to be hashed mutton and a united cradle, he would prefer Imogene Docimer to Gertrude Tringle for his companion.

But there was still open to him the one further chance with Sir Thomas; and this chance he could try with the

comfortable feeling that he might be almost indifferent as to what Sir Thomas might say. To be prepared for either lot is very self-assuring when any matter of difficulty has to be taken in hand. On arriving at the house in Lombard Street he soon found himself ushered once more into Sir Thomas's presence. "Well, Mr. Houston, what can I do for you to-day?" asked the man of business, with a pleasant smile.

"It is the old story, Sir Thomas."

"Don't you think, Mr. Houston, that there is something,—a little,—unmanly shall I call it, in coming so often about the same thing?"

"No, Sir Thomas, I do not. I think my conduct has been manly throughout."

"Weak, perhaps, would have been a better word. I do not wish to be uncourteous, and I will therefore withdraw unmanly. Is it not weak to encounter so many refusals on the same subject?"

"I should feel myself to have been very strong if after so many refusals I were to be successful at last."

"There is not the least chance of it."

"Why should there be no chance if your daughter's happiness depends upon it?"

"There is no chance, because I do not believe that my daughter's happiness does depend upon it. She is foolish, and has made a foolish proposition to you."

"What proposition?" asked Houston, in surprise, having heard nothing of that intercepted letter.

"That journey to Ostend, with the prospect of finding a good-natured clergyman in the town ! I hardly think you would be fool enough for that."

"No, Sir Thomas, I should not do that. I should think it wrong." This he said quite gravely, asking no questions ; but was very much at a loss to know where Sir Thomas had got his information.

"I am sure you would think it foolish : and it would be foolish. I pledge you my word, that were you to do such a thing I should not give you a shilling. I should not let my girl starve ; but I should save her from suffering in such a manner as to let you have no share of the sustenance I provided for her."

"There is no question of that kind," said Frank, angrily.

"I hope not ;—only as I know that the suggestion has been made I have thought it well to tell you what would be my conduct if it were carried out."

"It will not be carried out by me," said Frank.

"Very well ; I am glad to hear it. To tell the truth, I never thought that you would run the risk. A gentleman of your sort, when he is looking for a wife with money, likes to have the money quite certain."

"No doubt," said Frank, determined not to be brow-beaten.

"And now, Mr. Houston, let me say one word more to you and then we may part, as I hope, good friends. I do not mean my daughter Gertrude to marry any man such as you are ;—by that I mean an idle gentleman without

means. Should she do so in my teeth she would have to bear the punishment of sharing that poor gentleman's idleness and poverty. While I lived she would not be allowed absolutely to want, and when I died there would be some trifle for her, sufficient to keep the wolf from the door. But I give you my solemn word and honour that she shall never be the means of supplying wealth and luxury to such a husband as you would be. I have better purposes for my hard-earned money. Now, good-day." With that he rose from his chair and put out his hand. Frank rose also from his chair, took the hand that was offered him, and stepped out of Travers and Treason into Lombard Street, with no special desire to shake the dust off his feet as he did so. He felt that Sir Thomas had been reasonable,—and he felt also that Gertrude Tringle would perhaps have been dear at the money.

Two or three days afterwards he despatched the following little note to poor Gertrude at Merle Park;—

"DEAR GERTRUDE,

"I have seen your father again, and found him to be absolutely obdurate. I am sure he is quite in earnest when he tells me that he will not give his daughter to an impoverished idle fellow such as I am. Who shall say that he is wrong? I did not dare to tell him so, anxious as I was that he should change his purpose.

"I feel myself bound in honour, believing, as I do, that he is quite resolved in his purpose, to release you from your

promise. I should feel that I was only doing you an injury were I to ask you to be bound by an engagement which could not, at any rate for many years, be brought to a happy termination.

“As we may part as sincere friends I hope you will consent to keep the little token of my regard which I gave you.

“FRANK HOUSTON.”

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

FRANK HOUSTON IS PENITENT.

“AND now the Adriatic’s free to wed another,” said Houston to himself, as he put himself into a cab, and had himself carried to his club. There he wrote that valedictory letter to Gertrude which is given at the end of the last chapter. Had he reason to complain of his fate, or to rejoice? He had looked the question of an establishment full in the face,—an establishment to be created by Sir Thomas Tringle’s money, to be shared with Sir Thomas Tringle’s daughter, and had made up his mind to accept it, although the prospects were not, as he told himself, “altogether rosy.” When he first made up his mind to marry Gertrude,—on condition that Gertrude should bring with her, at any rate, not less than three thousand a-year,—he was quite aware that he would have to give up all his old ways of life, and all his little pleasures. He would become son-in-law to Sir Thomas Tringle, with a comfortable house to live in; with plenty to eat and drink, and, probably, a horse or two to ride. If he could manage things at their best, perhaps he might be able to settle himself at Pau, or some other place of the kind, so as to be as far away as possible from Tringle influences. But his little dinners at one club, his little rubbers of whist at the other club, his evenings at the

opera, the pleasant smiles of the ladies, whom he loved in a general way,—these would be done with for ever! Earn his own bread! Why, he was going to earn his bread, and that in a most disagreeable manner. He would set up an establishment, not because such an establishment would have any charms for him, but because he was compelled by lack of money to make some change in his present manner of life. And yet the time had been when he had looked forward to a marriage as the happiest thing that could befall him. As far as his nature could love, he had loved Imogene Docimer. There had come a glimpse upon him of something better than the little dinners and the little rubbers. There had been a prospect of an income,—not ample, as would have been that forthcoming from Sir Thomas,—but sufficient for a sweet and modest home, in which he thought that it would have sufficed for his happiness to paint a few pictures, and read a few books, and to love his wife and children. Even as to that there had been a doubt. There was a regret as to the charms of London life. But, nevertheless, he had made up his mind,—and she, without any doubt, had made up hers. Then that wicked uncle had died, and was found to have expended on his own pursuits the money which was to have been left to his nephew. Upon that there was an explanation between Frank and Imogene; and it was agreed that their engagement should be over, while a doubtful and dangerous friendship was to be encouraged between them.

Such was the condition of things when Frank first met Gertrude Tringle at Rome, now considerably more than

twelve months since. When Gertrude had first received his proposition favourably he had written to Imogene a letter in that drolling spirit common to him, in which he declared his purpose;—or rather, not his purpose, but his untoward fate, should the gods be unkind to him. She had answered him after the same fashion, saying, that in regard to his future welfare she hoped that the gods would prove unkind. But had he known how to read all that her letter expressed between the lines, he would have perceived that her heart was more strongly moved than his own. Since that time he had learned the lesson. There had been a letter or two; and then there had been that walk in the wood on the Italian side of the Tyrolese Alps. The reader may remember how he was hurried away in the diligence for Innspruck, because it was considered that his further sojourn in the same house with Imogene was dangerous. He had gone, and even as he went had attempted to make a joke of the whole affair. But it had not been quite a joke to him even then. There was Imogene's love and Imogene's anger,—and together with these an aversion towards the poor girl whom he intended to marry,—which became the stronger the more strongly he was convinced both of Imogene's love and of her anger.

Nevertheless, he persevered,—not with the best success, as has already been told. Now, as he left the house in Lombard Street, and wrote what was intended to be his last epistle to Gertrude, he was driven again to think of Miss Docimer. Indeed, he had in his pocket, as he sat at his club, a little note which he had lately received from

that lady, which, in truth, had disturbed him much when he made his last futile efforts at Merle Park and in Lombard Street. The little note was as follows;—

“DEAR FRANK,

“One little friendly word in spite of our storm on the Tyrolese hill-side! If Miss Tringle is to be the arbiter of your fate;—why, then, let there be an end of everything between us. I should not care to be called upon to receive such a Mrs. Frank Houston as a dear friend. But if Tringle père should at the last moment prove hard-hearted, then let me see you again.—Yours,

“I.”

With this letter in his pocket he had gone down to Merle Park, determined to put an end to the Tringle affair in one way or the other. His duty, as he had planned it to himself, would not be altered by Imogene's letter; but if that duty should become impracticable,—why, then, it would be open to him to consider whatever Imogene might have to say to him.

The Docimers were now in London, where it was their custom to live during six months of the year; but Houston had not been at their house since he had parted from them in the Tyrol. He had spent but little of his time in London since the autumn, and, when there, had not been anxious to see people who had, at any rate, treated him somewhat roughly. But now it would be necessary that he should answer Imogene's letter. What should be the nature of such answer he certainly had not as yet decided;

nor could he have decided before those very convincing assurances of Sir Thomas Tringle. That matter was at any rate over, and now the "Adriatic might wed another,"—if the Adriatic thought well to do so. The matter, however, was one which required a good deal of consideration. He gave to it ten minutes of intense thought, during which he consumed a cup of coffee and a cigarette; and then, throwing away the burnt end of the paper, he hurried into the morning-room, and wrote to the lady as follows;—

"DEAR IMOGENE,

"You will not have to press to your bosom as my wife the second daughter of Sir Thomas Tringle, Bart. The high honour of that alliance has at last been refused by him in very plain language. Had she become Mrs. Frank Houston, I do not doubt but you would have done your duty to your own cousin. That lot, however, has not been written for me in the Book of Fates. The father is persistent in looking upon me as an idle profligate adventurer; and though he has been kind enough to hint more than once that it might be possible for me to achieve the young lady, he has succeeded in convincing me that I never should achieve anything beyond the barren possession of her beauty. A wife and family on my present very moderate income would be burdensome; and, therefore, with infinite regrets, I have bade adieu to Miss Tringle.

"I have not hitherto been to see either you or your brother or Mrs. Docimer because I have been altogether unaware whether you or your brother or Mrs. Docimer

would be glad to see me. As you say yourself, there was a storm on the Tyrolese hill-side,—in which there was more than one wind blowing at the same time. I do not find fault with anybody,—perhaps a storm was needed to clear the air. But I hate storms. I do not pretend to be a very grand fellow, but I do endeavour not to be disagreeable. Your brother, if you remember, was a little hard. But, in truth, I say this only to account for my apparent incivility.

“And, perhaps, with another object;—to gain a little time before I plunge into the stern necessity of answering all that you say in your very comprehensive letter of five lines. The first four lines I have answered. There will be no such Mrs. Frank Houston as that suggested. And then, as to the last line. Of course, you will see me again, and that very speedily. So it would seem that the whole letter is answered.

“But yet it is not answered. There is so much in it that whole sheets would not answer it. A quire of note-paper stuffed full would hardly contain all that I might find to say in answer to it,—on one side and the other. Nay, I might fill as many reams of folio as are required for a three-volume novel. And then I might call it by one of two names, ‘The Doubts of Frank Houston,’ or ‘The Constancy of Imogene Docimer,’—as I should at last bring my story to one ending or the other. But the novel would contain that fault which is so prevalent in the novels of the present day. The hero would be a very namby-mamby sort of a fellow, whereas the heroine would be too perfect for human nature.

“The hero would be always repeating to himself a certain line out of a Latin poet, which, of all lines, is the most heart-breaking ;—

The better course I see and know ;—

The worser one is where I go.

But then in novels the most indifferent hero comes out right at last. Some god comes out of a theatrical cloud and leaves the poor devil ten thousand a-year and a title. He isn't much of a hero when he does go right under such inducements, but he suffices for the plot, and everything is rose-coloured. I would be virtuous at a much cheaper rate ;—if only a young man with his family might have enough to eat and drink. What is your idea of the lowest income at which a prudent,—say not idiotically-quixotic hero,—might safely venture to be heroic ?

“Now I have written to you a long letter, and think that I have indicated to you the true state of my feelings. Whatever may turn up I do not think I shall go fortune-hunting again. If half-a-million in female hands were to throw itself at my head, there is no saying whether I might not yield. But I do not think that I shall again make inquiry as to the amount of booty supposed to be within the walls of a city, and then sit down to besiege the city with regular lines of approach. It is a disgusting piece of work. I do not say but what I can lie, and did lie foully on the last siege operation ; but I do not like it. And then to be told that one is unmanly by the father, and a coward by the young lady, as occurred to me in this affair, is disheartening. They were both right, though I repudiated

their assertions. This might be borne as a prelude to success ; but, as part of a failure, it is disgusting. At the present moment I am considering what economy might effect as to a future bachelor life, and am meditating to begin with a couple of mutton chops and half-a-pint of sherry for my dinner to-day. I know I shall break down and have a woodcock and some champagne.

“I will come to you about three on Sunday. If you can manage that your brother should go out and make his calls, and your sister attend divine service in the afternoon, it would be a comfort.

“Your always, F. HOUSTON.”

It was a long rambling letter, without a word in it of solid clearly-expressed meaning; but Imogene, as she read it, understood very well its real purport. She understood more than its purport, for she could see by it,—more clearly than the writer did himself,—how far her influence over the man had been restored, and how far she might be able to restore it. But was it well that she should regain her influence? Her influence regained would simply mean a renewed engagement. No doubt the storm on the hill-side had come from the violence of true love on her part! No doubt her heart had been outraged by the idea that he should give himself up to another woman after all that had passed between them. She had been devoted to him altogether; but yet she had been taught by him to regard her love as a passion which of its nature contained something of the ridiculous. He had never ceased gently to

laugh at himself, even in her presence, because he had subjected himself to her attraction. She had caught up the same spirit,—or at any rate the expression of spirit,—and, deceived by that, he had thought that to relieve herself from the burden of her love would be as easy to her as to him. In making this mistake he had been ignorant of the intrinsic difference in the nature of a man's and of a woman's heart, and had been unaware that that, which to a man at his best can only be a part of his interest in his life's concerns, will to a woman be everything. She had attempted to follow his lead when it did not seem that by doing so she would lose anything. But when the moment of trial came she had not in truth followed his lead at all. She made the attempt, and in making the attempt gave him her permission to go from her; but when she realised the fact that he was gone,—or going,—then she broke down utterly. Then there came these contentions between her and her brother, and that storm on the hill-side.

After that she passed some months of wretchedness. There was no possibility for her to droll away her love. She had taught herself to love the man whether he were good or whether he were bad,—whether he were strong-hearted or whether he were fickle,—and the thing was there present to her, either as a permanent blessing, or, much more probably, a permanent curse. As the months went on she learned, though she never saw Frank himself, that his purpose of marrying Gertrude Tringle was not likely to be carried out. Then at last she wrote that comprehensive letter of five lines,—as Houston had called it. It had been

intended to be comprehensive, and did, in fact, contain much more than it seemed to say. "If you can bring yourself to return to me, and to endure whatever inconveniences may be incidental to your doing so, I hereby declare that I will do the same; and I declare also that I can find for myself no other content in the world except what may come to me from such an agreement between us." It was this that she said in that last line, in which she had begged him to come to her, if at the last moment "Tringle père" should prove to be hard-hearted. All troubles of poverty, all the lingering annoyance of waiting, all her possible doubts as to his future want of persistency, would be preferable to the great loss which she found herself unable to endure.

Yes; it would be very well that both her brother and her sister-in-law should be absent when he came to her. To neither of them had she said a word of her last correspondence;—to neither of them a word of her renewed hopes. For the objections which might be raised by either of them would she care little if she could succeed with Frank. But while that success was still doubtful it would be well to get at any rate the assistance of her sister-in-law. On the Sunday afternoon Mr. Docimer would certainly be away from the house. It was his custom to go off among his friends almost immediately after lunch, and his absence might be counted on as assured. But with his wife it was different. That project of sending her to church was quite out of the question. Mrs. Docimer generally went to church of a Sunday morning, and then always considered

herself to have performed the duties of the day. Nor did Imogene like the idea of this appointment with her lover without a word spoken about it to her sister-in-law. "Mary," she said, "Frank Houston is coming here on Sunday."

"Frank!" exclaimed Mrs. Docimer. "I thought we were to consider ourselves as altogether separated from that fortunate youth."

"I don't see why."

"Well; he left us not with the kindest possible feelings in the Tyrol; and he has allowed ever so many months to pass by without coming to see us. I asked Mudbury whether we should have him to dinner one day last week, and he said it would be better to let him go his own way."

"Nevertheless, he is coming here on Sunday."

"Has he written to you?"

"Yes, he has written to me,—in answer to a line from me. I told him that I wished to see him."

"Was that wise?"

"Wise or not, I did so."

"Why should you wish to see him?"

"Am I to tell you the truth or a lie?"

"Not a lie, certainly. I will not ask for the truth if the truth be unpalatable to you."

"It is unpalatable;—but yet I might as well tell it you. I wrote to ask him to come and see me, because I love him so dearly."

"Oh, Imogene!"

"It is the truth."

"Did you tell him so?"

"No; I told him nothing. I merely said, that, if this match was over between him and that girl of Sir Thomas Tringle, then he might come and see me again. That was all that I said." His letter was very much longer, but yet it did not say much. However, he is to come, and I am prepared to renew our engagement should he declare that he is willing to do so."

"What will Mudbury say?"

"I do not care very much what he says. I do not know that I am bound to care. If I have resolved to entangle myself with a long engagement, and Mr. Houston is willing to do the same, I do not think that my brother should interfere. I am my own mistress, and am dealing altogether with my own happiness.

"Imogene, we have discussed this so often before."

"Not a doubt; and with such effect that with my permission Frank was enabled to ask this young woman with a lot of money to marry him. Had it been arranged, I should have had no right to find fault with him, however sore of heart I might have been. All that has fallen through, and I consider myself quite entitled to renew my engagement again. I shall not ask him, you may be sure of that."

"It comes to the same thing, Imogene."

"Very likely. It often happens that ladies mean that to be expressed which it does not become them to say out loud. So it may be with me on this occasion. Nevertheless, the word, if it have to be spoken, will have to be

spoken by him. What I want you to do now is to let me have the drawing-room alone at three o'clock on Sunday. If anything has to be said it will have to be said without witnesses."

With some difficulty Mrs. Docimer was induced to accede to the request, and to promise that, at any rate for the present, nothing should be said to her husband on the subject.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

CAPTAIN BATSBY.

IN the meantime, poor Ayala, whose days were running on in a very melancholy manner under her aunt's wings in Kingsbury Crescent, was creating further havoc and disturbing the bosom of another lover. At Stalham she had met a certain Captain Batsby, and had there attracted his attention. Captain Batsby had begged her to ride with him on one of those hunting-days, and had offered to give her a lead,—having been at the moment particularly jealous of Colonel Stubbs. On that day both Ayala and Nina had achieved great honour;—but this, to the great satisfaction of Captain Batsby, had not been achieved under the leadership of Colonel Stubbs. Larry Twenty-man, long famous among the riding-men of the Ufford and Rufford United Hunt, had been the hero of the hour. Thus Captain Batsby's feelings had been spared, and after that he had imagined that any kindly feelings which Ayala might have had for the Colonel had sunk into abeyance. Then he had sought some opportunity to push himself into Ayala's favour, but hitherto his success in that direction had not been great.

Captain Batsby was regarded by the inhabitants of Stalham as a nuisance,—but as a nuisance which could not be

avoided. He was half-brother to Sir Harry, whose mother had married, as her second husband, a certain opulent Mr. Batsby out of Lancashire. They were both dead now, and nothing of them remained but this Captain. He was good-natured, simple, and rich, and in the arrangement of the Albury-cum-Batsby affairs, which took place after the death of Mrs. Batsby, made himself pleasant to everybody concerned. Sir Harry, who certainly had no particular affection for his half-brother, always bore with him on this account; and Lady Albury was equally gracious, mindful of the wisdom of keeping on good terms with a rich relation. It was as yet quite on the cards that the Batsby money might come to some of the Albury scions.

But the Captain was anxious to provide himself with a wife who might be the mother of scions of his own. In fact he had fallen fearfully in love with Ayala, and was quite resolved to ask her to be his wife when he found that she was just on the point of flying from Stalham. He had intended to be quicker in his operations, but had lacked opportunity. On that last hunting-day the Colonel had always been still in his way, and circumstances had never seemed to favour him when he endeavoured to have a few words in private with the young lady. Then she was gone, and he could only learn respecting her that she lived with her aunt, Mrs. Dosett, in Kingsbury Crescent.

“I’m blessed if Benjamin isn’t smitten with that girl!” Benjamin was Captain Batsby, and that girl was of course Ayala Dormer. The man who blessed himself was Sir Harry Albury, and the observation was addressed to his

wife. This took place within an hour of Ayala's departure from Stalham.

"Benjamin in love with Ayala Dormer! I don't believe a word of it," said Lady Albury. It was not surprising that she should not believe it. There was her special favourite, Colonel Stubbs, infatuated by the same girl; and, as she was aware, Tom Tringle, the heir of Travers and Treason, was in the same melancholy condition. And, after all, according to her thinking, there was nothing in the girl to justify all this fury. In her eyes Ayala was pretty, but no more. She would have declared that Ayala had neither bearing, nor beauty, nor figure. A bright eye, a changing colour, and something of vivacity about her mouth, was all of which Ayala had to boast. Yet here were certainly the heir of the man of millions, and that Crichton of a Colonel, both knocked off their legs. And now she was told that Captain Batsby, who always professed himself hard to please in the matter of young ladies, was in the same condition. "Do you mean to say he told you?" she asked.

"No," said Sir Harry; "he is not at all the man to do that. In such a matter he is sure to have a great secret, and be sure also to let his secret escape in every word that he speaks. You will find that what I say is truth."

Before the day was out Lady Albury did find her husband to be correct. Captain Batsby, though he was very jealous of his secret, acknowledged to himself the necessity of having one confidant. He could hardly, he thought, follow Ayala without some assistance. He knew nothing

of Mrs. Dosett, nothing of Kingsbury Crescent, and very little as to Ayala herself. He regarded Lady Albury as his chosen friend, and generally communicated to her whatever troubles he might have. These had consisted chiefly of the persecutions to which he had been subjected by the mothers of portionless young ladies. How not to get married off against his will had been the difficulty of his life. His half sister-in-law had hitherto preserved him, and therefore to her he now went for assistance in this opposite affair. "Rosalind," he said in his gravest voice, "what do you think I have to tell you?"

Lady Albury knew what was coming, but of course she hid her knowledge. "I hope Mrs. Motherly has not written to you again," she said. Mrs. Motherly was a lady who had been anxious that her daughter should grace Captain Batsby's table, and had written to him letters, asking him his intentions.

"Oh, dear; nothing of that kind. I do not care a straw for Mrs. Motherly or the girl either. I never said a word to her that any one could make a handle of. But I want to say a word to somebody now."

"What sort of word is it to be, Ben?"

"Ah," he groaned. "Rosalind, you must understand that I never was so much in earnest in my life!"

"You are always in earnest."

Then he sighed very deeply. "I shall expect you to help me through this matter, Rosalind."

"Do I not always help you?"

"Yes; you do. But you must stick to me now like

wax. What do you think of that young lady, Miss Dormer?"

"I think she is a pretty girl; and the gentlemen tell me that she rides bravely."

"Don't you consider her divine?" he asked.

"My dear Ben, one lady never considers another to be divine. Among ourselves we are terribly human, if not worse. Do you mean to tell me that you are in love with Ayala Dormer?"

"You have guessed it," said he. "You always do guess everything."

"I generally do guess as much as that, when young gentlemen find young ladies divine. Do you know anything about Miss Dormer?"

"Nothing but her beauty;—nothing but her wit;—nothing but her grace! I know all that, and I don't seem to want to know any more."

"Then you must be in love! In the first place she hasn't got a sixpence in the world."

"I don't want sixpences," said the Captain, proudly.

"And in the next place I am not at all sure that you would like her people. Father and mother she has none."

"Then I cannot dislike them."

"But she has uncles and aunts, who are, I am afraid, objectionable. She lives with a Mr. Dosett, who is a clerk in Somerset House,—a respectable man, no doubt, but one whom you would not perhaps want at your house very often."

"I don't care about uncles and aunts," said Captain

Batsby. "Uncles and aunts can always be dropped much easier than fathers and mothers. At any rate I am determined to go on, and I want you to put me in the way. How must I find her?"

"Go to No. 10, Kingsbury Crescent, Bayswater. Ask for Mrs. Dosett and tell her what you've come about. When she knows that you are well off she will not turn a deaf ear to you. What the girl may do it is beyond me to say. She is very peculiar."

"Peculiar?" said the Captain with another sigh.

Lady Albury did, in truth, think Ayala was very peculiar, seeing that she had refused two such men as Tom Tringle in spite of his wealth, and Colonel Stubbs in spite of his position. This she had done though she had no prospects of her own before her, and no comfortable home at the present! Might it not be more than probable that she would also refuse Captain Batsby, who was less rich than the one and certainly less known to the world than the other? But as to this it was not necessary that she should say anything. To assist Colonel Stubbs she was bound by true affection for the man. In regard to her husband's half-brother she was only bound to seem to assist him. "I can write a line to Mrs. Dosett, if you wish it," she said, "or to Miss Dormer."

"I wish you would. It would be best to tell the aunt, and just tell her that I am fairly well off. She'll tell Ayala I could make quite a proper settlement on her. That kind of thing does go a long way with young ladies."

"It ought to do at any rate," said Lady Albury. "It

certainly does with the old ladies." Then the matter was settled. She was to write to Mrs. Dosett and inform that lady that Captain Batsby intended to call in Kingsbury Crescent in the form of a suitor for Miss Ayala Dormer's hand. She would go on to explain that Captain Batsby was quite in a position to marry and maintain a wife.

"And if she should accept me you'll have her down here, Rosalind?" Here was a difficulty, as it was already understood that Ayala was to be again brought down to Stalham on the Colonel's account; but Lady Albury could make the promise, as, should the Captain be accepted, no harm would in that case be done to the Colonel. She was, however, tolerably sure that the Captain would not be accepted. "And, if she shouldn't take me all at once, still you might have her," suggested the lover. As to this, which was so probable, there would be a great difficulty. Ayala was to be seduced into coming again to Stalham if possible,—but specially on the Colonel's behoof. In such a case it must be done behind the Captain's back. Lady Albury saw the troubles which were coming, but nevertheless she promised that she would see what could be done. All this having been settled, Captain Batsby took his leave and went off to London.

Mrs. Dosett, when she received Lady Albury's letter, was very much surprised. She too failed to understand what there was in Ayala to produce such a multiplicity of suitors, one after another. When Lucy came to her and had begun to be objectionable, she had thought that she might some day be relieved from her troubles by the girl's

marriage. Lucy, to her eyes, was beautiful, and mistress of a manner likely to be winning in a man's eyes, though ungracious to herself. But in regard to Ayala she had expressed nothing of the kind. Ayala was little, and flighty, and like an elf,—as she had remarked to her husband. But now, within twelve months, three lovers had appeared, and each of them suitable for matrimonial purposes. She could only tell her husband, and then tell Ayala.

“Captain Batsby! I don't believe it!” said Ayala, almost crying. If Colonel Stubbs could not be made to assume the garb of an Angel of Light what was she to think of Captain Batsby?

“You can read Lady Albury's letter.”

“I don't want to read Lady Albury's letter. I won't see him. I don't care what my uncle says. I don't care what anybody says. Yes, I do know him. I remember him very well. I spoke to him once or twice, and I did not like him at all.”

“You said the same of Colonel Stubbs.”

“I didn't say the same of Colonel Stubbs. He is a great deal worse than Colonel Stubbs.”

“And you said just the same of Tom.”

“He is the same as Tom;—just as bad. It is no good going on about him, Aunt Margaret. I won't see him. If I were locked up in a room with him I wouldn't speak a word to him. He has no right to come.”

“A gentleman, my dear, has always a right to ask a lady to be his wife if he has got means.”

"You always say so, Aunt Margaret, but I don't believe it. There should be,—there should have been,—I don't know what; but I am quite sure the man has no right to come to me, and I won't see him." To this resolution Ayala clung, and, as she was very firm about it, Mrs. Dosett, after consultation with her husband, at last gave way, and consented to see Captain Batsby herself.

In due time Captain Batsby came. At any knock heard at the door during this period Ayala flew out of the drawing-room into her own chamber; and at the Captain's knock she flew with double haste, feeling sure that this was the special knock. The man was shown up, and in a set speech declared his purpose to Mrs. Dosett, and expressed a hope that Lady Albury might have written on the subject. Might he be allowed to see the young lady?

"I fear that it would be of no service, Captain Batsby."

"Of no service?"

"On receiving Lady Albury's letter I was of course obliged to tell my niece the honour you proposed to do her."

"I am quite in earnest, you know," said the Captain.

"So I suppose, as Lady Albury would not have written, nor would you have come on such a mission. But so is my niece in earnest."

"She will, at any rate, hear what I have got to say."

"She would rather not," said Mrs. Dosett. "She thinks that it would only be painful to both of you. As she has quite made up her mind that she cannot accept the honour you propose to do her, what good would it serve?"

"Is Miss Dormer at home?" asked the Captain, suddenly.

Mrs. Dosett hesitated for a while, anxious to tell a lie on the matter, but fearing to do so. "I suppose she is at home," continued the urgent lover.

"Miss Dormer is at present in her own chamber."

"Then I think I ought to see her," continued the Captain.

"She can't know at present what is my income."

"Lady Albury has told us that it is sufficient."

"But that means nothing. Your niece cannot be aware that I have a very pretty little place of my own down in Berkshire."

"I don't think it would make a difference," said Mrs. Dosett.

"Or that I shall be willing to settle upon her a third of my income. It is not many gentlemen who will do as much as that for a young lady, when the young lady has nothing of her own."

"I am sure you are very generous."

"Yes, I am. I always was generous. And I have no impediments to get rid of; not a trouble of that kind in all the world. And I don't owe a shilling. Very few young men, who have lived as much in the world as I have, can say that."

"I am sure your position is all that is desirable."

"That's just it. No position could be more desirable. I should give up the service immediately as soon as I was married." At that Mrs. Dosett bowed, not knowing what words to find for further conversation. "After that," continued the Captain, "do you mean to say that I am not to be allowed to see the young lady?"

"I cannot force her to come down, Captain Batsby."

"I would if I were you."

"Force a young lady?"

"Something ought to be done," said he, beginning almost to whine. "I have come here on purpose to see her, and I am quite prepared to do what is handsome. My half-sister, Lady Albury, had her down at Stalham, and is quite anxious to have her there again. I suppose you have no objection to make to me, Mrs. Dosett?"

"Oh, dear no."

"Or Mr. Dosett?"

"I do not say that he has, Captain Batsby; but this is a matter in which a young lady's word must be paramount. We cannot force her to marry you, or even to speak to you." The Captain still went on with entreaties, till Mrs. Dosett found herself so far compelled to accede to him as to go up to Ayala's room and beg her to come down and answer this third suitor with her own voice. But Ayala was immovable. When her aunt came near her she took hold of the bed as though fearing an attempt would be made to drag her out of the room. She again declared that if she were forced into the room below nothing could oblige her to speak even a word.

"As for thanking him," she said, "you can do that yourself, Aunt Margaret, if you like. I am not a bit obliged to him; but, if you choose to say so, you may; only pray do tell him to go away,—and tell him never, never to come back any more." Then Mrs. Dosett returned to the drawing-room, and declared that her embassy had been quite in vain.

“In all my life,” said Captain Batsby, as he took his leave, “I never heard of such conduct before.” Nevertheless, as he went away he made up his mind that Lady Albury should get Ayala again down to Stalham. He was very angry, but his love remained as hot as ever.

“As I did not succeed in seeing her,” he said, in a letter to his half-sister, “of course I do not know what she might have said to me herself. I might probably have induced her to give me another hearing. I put it all down to that abominable aunt, who probably has some scheme of her own, and would not let Miss Dormer come down to me. If you will have her again at Stalham, everything may be made to go right.”

* * * * *

At home, in Kingsbury Crescent, when Ayala had gone to bed, both Mr. and Mrs. Dossett expressed themselves as much troubled by the peculiarity of Ayala's nature. Mrs. Dossett declared her conviction that that promised legacy from Uncle Tom would never be forthcoming, because he had been so much offended by the rejection of his own son. And even should the legacy remain written in Sir Thomas's will, where would Ayala find a home if Mr. Dossett were to die before the baronet? This rejection of suitors,—of fit, well-to-do, unobjectionable suitors,—was held by Mrs. Dossett to be very wicked, and a direct flying in the face of Providence. “Does she think,” said Mrs. Dossett, urging the matter with all her eloquence to her husband, “that young men with incomes are to be coming after her always like this?” Mr. Dossett shook his

head and scratched it at the same time, which was always a sign with him that he was not at all convinced by the arguments used, but that he did not wish to incur further hostility by answering them. "Why shouldn't she see an eligible man when he comes recommended like this?"

"I suppose, my dear, she didn't think him nice enough."

"Nice! pshaw! I call it a direct flying in the face of Providence. If he were ever so nasty and twice as old she ought to think twice about it in her position. There is poor Tom, they say, absolutely ill. The housekeeper was over here from Queen's Gate the other day, and she declares that that affair about the policeman all came from his being in love. And now he has left the business and has gone to Merle Park, because he is so knocked in a heap that he cannot hold up his head."

"I don't see why love should make a man punch a policeman's breath out of him," said Mr. Dosett.

"Of course Tom was foolish; but he would do very well if she would have him. Of course your sister, and Sir Thomas, and all of them, will be very furious. What right will she have to expect money after that?"

"Tom is an ass," said Mr. Dosett.

"I suppose Colonel Stubbs is an ass too. What I want to know is what it is she looks for. Like any other girl, she expects to get married some day, I suppose; but she has been reading poetry, and novels, and trash, till she has got her head so full of nonsense that she doesn't know what it is she does want. I should like to shake her till I

shook all the romance out of her. If there is anything I do hate it is romance, while bread and meat, and coals, and washing, are so dear." With this Mrs. Dosett took herself and her troubles up to her bedroom.

Mr. Dosett sat for a while gazing with speculative eyes at the embers of the fire. He was conscious in his heart that some part of that attack upon romance in general was intended for himself. Though he did not look to be romantic, especially when seated at his desk in Somerset House, with his big index-book before him, still there was left about him some touch of poetry, and an appreciation of the finer feelings of our nature. Though he could have wished that Ayala should have been able to take one of these three well-to-do suitors, who were so anxious to obtain her hand, still he could not bring himself not to respect her, still he was unable not to love her, because she was steadfastly averse to accept as a husband a man for whom she had no affection. As he looked at the embers he asked himself how it ought to be. Here was a girl whose only gift in life was her own personal charm. That that charm must be powerful was evident from the fact that she could so attract such men as these. Of the good things of the world, of a pleasant home, of ample means, and of all that absence of care which comes from money, poor Mr. Dosett had by no means a poor appreciation. That men are justified in seeking these good things by their energy, industry, and talents, he was quite confident. How was it with a girl who had nothing else but her beauty,—or, perhaps, her wit,—in lieu of energy and in-

dust? Was she justified in carrying her wares also into the market, and making the most of them? The embers had burned so low, and he had become so cold before he had settled the question in his own mind, that he was obliged to go up to bed, leaving it unsettled.

CHAPTER XL.

AUNT EMMELINE'S NEW PROPOSITION.

A FEW days after this, just as the bread and cheese had been put on the table for the modest mid-day meal at Kingsbury Crescent, there came a most unwonted honour on Mrs. Dosett. It was a call from no less a person than Lady Tringle herself, who had come all the way up from Merle Park on purpose. It was a Saturday. She had travelled by herself and intended to go back on the same day with her husband. This was an amount of trouble which she very seldom gave herself, not often making a journey to London during the periods of her rural sojourn; and, when she began by assuring her sister-in-law that she made the journey with no object but that of coming to Kingsbury Crescent, Mrs. Dosett was aware that something very important was to be communicated. Mrs. Dosett and Ayala were together in the dining-room when Lady Tringle appeared, and the embracings were very affectionate. They were particularly affectionate towards Ayala, who was kissed as though nothing had ever happened to interfere with the perfect love existing between the aunt and the niece. They were more than friendly, almost sisterly, towards Mrs. Dosett, whom in truth Lady Tringle

met hardly more than once in a year. It was very manifest that Aunt Emmeline wanted to have something done. "Now, my darling," she said, turning to Ayala, "if you would not mind going away for ten minutes, I could say a few words on very particular business to your aunt." Then she gave her niece a tender little squeeze and assumed her sweetest smile.

- It will be as well to go back a little and tell the cause which had produced this unexpected visit. There had been very much of real trouble at Merle Park. Everything was troublesome. Gertrude had received her final letter from her lover, had declared herself to be broken-hearted, and was evincing her sorrow by lying in bed half the day, abstaining from her meals, and relieving herself from famine by sly visits to the larder. It was supposed that her object was to bend the stony heart of her father, but the process added an additional trouble to her mother. Then the Trafficks were a sore vexation. It was now nearly the end of January and they were still at Merle Park. There had been a scene in which Sir Thomas had been very harsh. "My dear," he had said to his wife, "I find that something must be done to the chimney of the north room. The workmen must be in it by the first of February. See and have all the furniture taken out before they come." Now the north room was the chamber in which the Trafficks slept, and the Trafficks were present when the order was given. No one believed the story of the chimney. This was the mode of expulsion which Sir Thomas had chosen on the spur of the moment. Mr. Traffick said not

a word, but in the course of the morning Augusta expostulated with her mother. This was also disagreeable. Then the condition of Tom was truly pitiable. All his trust in champagne, all his bellicose humour, had deserted him. He moped about the place the most miserable of human beings, spending hour after hour in imploring his mother's assistance. But Lucy with her quiet determination, and mute persistency in waiting, was a source of almost greater annoyance to her aunt than even her own children. That Lucy should in any degree have had her way with Mr. Hamel, had gone against the grain with her. Mr. Hamel, to her thinking, was a person to be connected with whom would be a disgrace. She was always speaking of his birth, of his father's life, and of those Roman iniquities. She had given way for a time when she had understood that her husband intended to give the young people money enough to enable them to marry. In that case Lucy would at once be taken away from the house. But now all that had come to an end. Sir Thomas had given no money, and had even refused to give any money. Nevertheless he was peacefully indulgent to Lucy, and was always scolding his wife because she was hostile to Lucy's lover.

In this emergency she induced him to accede to a proposition, by which one of her miseries would be brought to an end and another might perhaps be remedied. A second exchange should be made. Lucy should be sent back to Kingsbury Crescent, and Ayala should once more be brought into favour at Merle Park, Queen's Gate, and Glenbogie. "Your brother will never put up with it,"

said Sir Thomas. Lady Tringle was not afraid of her brother, and thought that by soft words she might even talk over her sister-in-law. Ayala, she knew, had been troublesome in Kingsbury Crescent. She was sure, she said, Ayala's whims would of their nature be more troublesome to such a woman as Mrs. Dosett than Lucy's obstinacy. Ayala had no doubt been pert and disobedient at Glenbogie and at Rome, but there had been an unbending obduracy about Lucy which had been more distasteful to Aunt Emmeline than even Ayala's pert disobedience. "It will be the only way," she had said to Sir Thomas, "to put Tom on his legs again. If the girl comes back here she will be sure to have him at last." There was much in this which to Sir Thomas was weak and absurd. That prolonged journey round by San Francisco, Japan, and Peking, was the remedy which recommended itself to him. But he was less able to despatch Tom at once to Japan than the elder Faddle had been to send off the younger Faddle to the stern realities of life in Aberdeen. He was quite willing that Tom should marry Ayala if it could be arranged, and therefore he gave his consent.

So armed, Lady Tringle had come up to Kingsbury Crescent, and was now about to undertake a task, which she acknowledged to herself to be difficult. She, in the first place, had had her choice and had selected a niece. Then she had quarrelled with her own selection, and had changed nieces. This had been done to accommodate her own fancy; and now she wanted to change the nieces back again! She felt aware that her request was unreasonable,

and came, therefore, determined to wrap it up in her blandest smiles.

When Ayala had left the room Mrs. Dosett sat mute in attention. She was quite aware that something very much out of the ordinary way was to be asked of her. In her ordinary way Lady Tringle never did smile when she came to Kingsbury Crescent. She would be profuse in finery, and would seem to throw off sparks of wealth at every word she spoke. Now even her dress had been toned down to her humbler manner, and there was no touch of her husband's purse in her gait. "Margaret," she said, "I have a proposition of great importance to make to you." Mrs. Dosett opened her eyes wider and sat still mute. "That poor girl is not,—is not,—is not doing perhaps the very best for herself here at Kingsbury Crescent."

"Why is she not doing the best for herself?" asked Mrs. Dosett, angrily.

"Do not for a moment suppose that I am finding fault either with you or my brother."

"You'd be very wrong if you did."

"No doubt ;—but I am not finding fault. I know how very generous you have both been. Of course Sir Thomas is a rich man, and what he gives to one of the girls comes to nothing. Of course it is different with you. It is hard upon my brother to have any such burden put upon him ; and it is very good both in him and you to bear it."

"What is it you want us to do now, Emmeline?"

"Well ;—I was going to explain. I do think it a great pity that Tom and Ayala should not become man and wife.

If ever any young man ever did love a girl I believe that he loves her."

"I think he does."

"It is dreadful. I never saw anything like it. He is just for all the world like those young men we read of who do all manner of horrible things for love,—smothering themselves and their young women with charcoal, or throwing them into the Regent's Canal. I am constantly afraid of something happening. It was all because of Ayala that he got into that terrible row at the police court,—and then we were afraid he was going to take to drink. He has given all that up now."

"I am very glad he has given drink up. That wouldn't do him any good."

"He is quite different now. The poor fellow hardly takes anything. He will sit all the afternoon smoking cigarettes and sipping tea. It is quite sad to see him. Then he comes and talks to me, and is always asking me to make Ayala have him."

"I don't think that anybody can ever make Ayala do anything."

"Not quite by talking to her. I dare say not. I did not mean to say a word to her about it just now."

"We can do nothing, I fear," said Mrs. Dosett.

"I was going to suggest something. But I wanted first to say a word or two about poor Lucy." They were just at present all "poor" to Lady Tringle,—Ayala, Lucy, Tom, and Gertrude. Even Augusta was poor because she was to be turned out of her bedroom.

“Is she in trouble?”

“Oh, dear, yes. But,” she added, thinking well to correct herself, so that Mrs. Dosett might not imagine that she would have to look forward to troubles with Lucy, “she could arrange her affairs, no doubt, if she were not with us. She is engaged to that Mr. Isadore Hamel, the sculptor.”

“So I have heard.”

“He does not earn very much just at present, I fear. Sir Thomas did offer to help him, but he was perhaps a little hoity-toity, giving himself airs. That, however, did not come off, and there they are, waiting. I don’t mean to say a word against poor Lucy. I think it a pity, you know; but perhaps it was natural enough. He isn’t what I should have liked for a niece who was living with me just as though she was my daughter; but I couldn’t help that.”

“But what are we to do, Emmeline?”

“Let them just change places again.”

“Change again! Ayala go to you and Lucy come back here!”

“Just that. If Ayala were with us she would be sure to get used to Tom at last. And then Lucy could manage her affairs with Mr. Hamel so much better if she were with you.”

“Why should she manage her affairs better if she were with us?”

Lady Tringle was aware that this was the weak part of her case. On the poor Ayala and poor Tom side of the question there was a good deal which might be said. Then, though she might not convince, she might be eloquent. But, touching Lucy, she could say nothing which did not

simply signify that she wanted to get rid of the girl. Now, Mrs. Dosett had also wanted to get rid of Lucy when the former exchange had been made. "What I mean is, that, if she were away, Sir Thomas would be more likely to do something for her." This was an invention at the spur of the moment.

"Do you not feel that the girls should not be chucked about like balls from a battledore?" asked Mrs. Dosett.

"For their own good, Margaret. I only propose it for their own good. You can't but think it would be a good thing for Ayala to be married to our Tom."

"If she liked him."

"Why shouldn't she like him? You know what that means. Poor Ayala is young, and a little romantic. She would be a great deal happier if all that could be knocked out of her. She has to marry somebody, and the sooner she settles down the better. Sir Thomas will do anything for them;—a horse and carriage, and anything she could set her heart upon! There is nothing Sir Thomas would not do for Tom so as to get him put upon his legs again."

"I don't think Ayala would go."

"She must, you know," whispered Lady Tringle, "if we both tell her."

"And Lucy?"

"She must too," again whispered Lady Tringle. "If they are told they are to go, what else can they do? Why shouldn't Ayala wish to come?"

"There were quarrels before."

"Yes;—because of Augusta. Augusta is married

now." Lady Tringle could not quite say that Augusta was gone.

"Will you speak to Ayala?"

"Perhaps it would come better from you, Margaret, if you agree with me."

"I am not sure that I do. I am quite sure that your brother would not force her to go, whether she wished it or not. No doubt we should be glad if the marriage could be arranged. But we cannot force a girl to marry, and her aversion in this case is so strong——"

"Aversion !"

"Aversion to being married, I mean. It is so strong that I do not think she will go of her own accord to any house where she is likely to meet her cousin. I dare say she may be a fool. I say nothing about that. Of course, she shall be asked; and, if she wishes to go, then Lucy can be asked too. But of course it must all depend upon what your brother says."

Then Lady Tringle took her leave without again seeing Ayala herself, and as she went declared her intention of calling at Somerset House. She would not think it right, she said, in a matter of such importance, to leave London without consulting her brother. It might be possible, she thought, that she would be able to talk her brother over; whereas his wife, if she had the first word, might turn him the other way.

"Is Aunt Emmeline gone?" asked Ayala, when she came down. "I am glad she has gone, because I never

know how to look when she calls me dear. I know she hates me."

"I hope not, Ayala."

"I am sure she does, because I hated Augusta. I do hate Augusta, and my aunt hates me. The only one of the lot I like is Uncle Tom."

Then the proposition was made, Ayala sitting with her mouth wide open as the details, one after another, were opened out to her. Her aunt did it with exquisite fairness, abstaining from opening out some of the details which might be clear enough to Ayala without any explanation. Her Aunt Emmeline was very anxious to have her back again,—the only reason for her former expulsion having been the enmity of Augusta. Her Uncle Tom and her aunt, and, no doubt, Gertrude, would be very glad to receive her. Not a word was said about Tom. Then something was urged as to the material comforts of the Tringle establishments, and of the necessary poverty of Kingsbury Crescent.

"And Lucy is to have the poverty?" said Ayala, indignantly.

"I think it probable, my dear, that before long Lucy will become the wife of Mr. Hamel.

"And you want to get rid of me?" demanded Ayala.

"No, my dear; not so. You must not think that for a moment. The proposition has not originated with me at all. I am endeavouring to do my duty by explaining to you the advantages which you would enjoy by going to

your Aunt Emmeline, and which you certainly cannot have if you remain here. And I must tell you, that, if you return to Sir Thomas, he will probably provide for you. You know what I mean by providing for you?"

"No, I don't," said Ayala, who had in her mind some dim idea that her cousin Tom was supposed to be a provision. She was quite aware that her Aunt Margaret, in her explanation as hitherto given, had not mentioned Tom's name, and was sure that it had not been omitted without reason.

"By providing, I mean that if you are living in his house he will leave you something in his will;—as would be natural that he should do for a child belonging to him. Your Uncle Reginald"—this she said in a low and very serious tone—"will, I fear, have nothing to leave to you." Then there was silence for some minutes, after which Mrs. Dosett asked the important question, "Well, Ayala, what do you think about it?"

"Must I go?" said Ayala. "May I stay?"

"Yes, my dear; you may certainly stay if you wish it."

"Then I will stay," said Ayala, jumping up on to her feet. "You do not want to turn me out, Aunt Margaret?" Then she went down on her knees, and, leaning on her aunt's lap, looked up into her face. "If you will keep me I will try to be good."

"My dear, you are good. I have nothing to complain of. Of course we will keep you. Nobody has thought for a moment of bidding you go. But you should understand that when your aunt made the proposition I was bound to

tell it you." Then there was great embracing and kissing, and Ayala felt that she was relieved from a terrible danger. She had often declared that no one could make her marry her cousin Tom; but it had seemed to her for a moment that if she were given up bodily to the Tringles no mode of escape would be open to her short of suicide. There had been a moment almost of regret that she had never brought herself to regard Jonathan Stubbs as an Angel of Light.

At Somerset House Lady Tringle made her suggestion to her brother with even more flowery assurance of general happiness than she had used in endeavouring to persuade his wife. Ayala would, of course, be married to Tom in the course of the next six months, and during the same period Lucy, no doubt, would be married to that very enterprising but somewhat obstinate young man, Mr. Hamel. Thus there would be an end to all the Dormer troubles; "and you, Reginald," she said, "will be relieved from a burden which never ought to have been laid upon your shoulder."

"We will think of it," he said very gravely, over and over again. Beyond that "we will think of it" he could not be induced to utter a word.

CHAPTER XLI.

“A COLD PROSPECT!”

THREE days were allowed to Frank Houston to consider within his own mind what he would say for himself and what he would propose finally to do when he should see Miss Docimer on the appointed Sunday. He was called upon to decide whether, after so many resolutions made to the contrary, he would now at last bring himself to encounter poverty and a family,—genteel poverty with about seven hundred and fifty pounds a-year between himself and his wife. He had hitherto been very staunch on the subject, and had unfortunately thought that Imogene Docimer had been as firmly fixed in her determination. His theory had in itself been good. If two people marry they are likely, according to the laws of nature, to have very soon more than two. In the process of a dozen years they may not improbably become ever so many more than two. Funds which were barely enough, if enough, for two, would certainly fail to be enough for half-a dozen. His means were certainly not enough for himself, as he had hitherto found them. Imogene's means were less even

than his own. Therefore, it was clear that he and Imogene ought not to marry and encounter the danger of all those embryo mouths. There was a logic about it which had seemed to him to be unanswerable. It was a logic which applied to his case above all others. The man who had a hope of earning money need not be absolutely bound by it. To him the money might come as quickly as the mouths. With the cradles would arrive the means of buying the cradles. And to the man who had much more than enough for himself,—to such a man as he had expected to be while he was looking forward to the coffin of that iniquitous uncle,—the logic did not apply at all. In defending himself, both to himself and to Imogene, he was very strong upon that point. A man who had plenty and would not divide his plenty with another might with truth be called selfish. Rich old bachelors might with propriety be called curmudgeons. But was it right that a man should be abused,—even by a young lady to whom, under more propitious circumstances, he had offered his heart,—when he declared himself unwilling to multiply suffering by assisting to bring into the world human beings whom he would be unable to support? He had felt himself to be very strong in his logic, and had unfortunately made the mistake of supposing that it was as clear to Imogene as to himself.

Then he had determined to rectify the inconvenience of his position. It had become manifest to him whilst he was waiting for his uncle's money that not only were his own means insufficient for married life but even for single comfort. It would always come to pass that when he had re-

solved on two mutton chops and half-a-pint of sherry the humble little meal would spread itself into woodcock and champagne. He regarded it as an unkindness in Providence that he should not have been gifted with economy. Therefore, he had to look about him for a remedy; and, as Imogene was out of the question, he found a remedy in Gertrude Tringle. He had then believed that everything was settled for him,—not, indeed, in a manner very pleasant, but after a fashion that would make life possible to him. Sir Thomas had given one of his daughters, with a large sum of money, to such a man as Septimus Traffick,—a man more impecunious than himself, one whom Frank did not hesitate to pronounce to be much less of a gentleman. That seat in the House of Commons was to him nothing. There were many men in the House of Commons to whom he would hardly condescend to speak. To be the younger son of a latter-day peer was to him nothing. He considered himself in all respects to be a more eligible husband than Septimus Traffick. Therefore he had entertained but little doubt when he found himself accepted by Gertrude herself and her mother. Then by degrees he had learnt to know something of the young lady to whom he intended to devote himself; and it had come to pass that the better he had known the less he had liked her. Nevertheless he had persevered, groaning in spirit as he thought of the burden with which he was about to inflict himself. Then had come the release. Sir Thomas had explained to him that no money would be forthcoming; and the young lady had made to him a foolish proposition, which, as he

thought, fully justified him in regarding the match as at an end.

And then he had three days in which to make up his mind. It may be a question whether three days are ever much better than three minutes for such a purpose. A man's mind will very generally refuse to make itself up until it be driven and compelled by emergency. The three days are passed not in forming but in postponing judgment. In nothing is procrastination so tempting as in thought. So it came to pass, that through the Thursday, the Friday, and the Saturday, Frank Houston came to no conclusion, though he believed that every hour of the time was devoted to forming one. Then, as he ate his dinner on Saturday night at his club, a letter was brought to him, the handwriting of which was familiar to him. This letter assisted him little in thinking.

The letter was from Gertrude Tringle, and need not be given in its entirety. There was a good deal of reproach, in that he had been so fickle as to propose to abandon her at the first touch of adversity. Then she had gone on to say, that, knowing her father a great deal better than he could do, she was quite satisfied that the money would be all right. But the last paragraph of the letter shall be given. "Papa has almost yielded already. I have been very ill;"—here the extent of her malady was shown by the strength of the underscoring with which the words were made significant;—"very ill indeed," she went on to say, "as you will understand if you have ever really loved me. I have kept my bed almost ever since I got your

cruel letter." Bed and cruel were again strenuously underscored. "It has made papa very unhappy, and, though he has said nothing to myself, he has told mamma that if I am really in earnest he will do something for us." The letter was long, but this is all the reader need see of it. But it must be explained that the young lady had greatly exaggerated her mother's words, and that her mother had exaggerated those which Sir Thomas had spoken. "She is a stupid idiot," Sir Thomas had said to his wife. "If she is obedient, and does her duty, of course I shall do something for her some day." This had been stretched to that promise of concession which Gertrude communicated to her lover.

This was the assistance which Frank Houston received in making up his mind on Saturday night. If what the girl said was true, there was still open to him the manner of life which he had prepared for himself; and he did believe the announcement to be true. Though Sir Thomas had been so persistent in his refusals, his experience in life had taught him to believe that a parent's sternness is never a match for a daughter's obstinacy. Had there been a touch of tenderness in his heart to the young lady herself he would not have abandoned her so easily. But he had found his consolation when giving up his hope of Sir Thomas's money. Now, should he again take to the girl, and find his consolation in accepting the money? Should he resolve upon doing so, this would materially affect any communication which he might make to Imogene on the following day.

While thus in doubt he went into the smoking-room and there he found any thinking to be out of the question. A great question was being debated as to club law. One man had made an assertion. He had declared that another man had been seen playing cards in a third man's company. A fourth man had, thereupon, put his hat on his head, and had declared contumaciously that the "assertion was not true." Having so declared he had contumaciously stalked out of the room, and had banged the door after him,—very contumaciously indeed. The question was whether the contumacious gentleman had misbehaved himself in accordance with the rules of the club, and, if so, what should be done to him. Not true is as bad as "false." "False," applied to a gentleman in a club, must be matter either of an apology or expulsion. The objectionable word had, no doubt, been said in defence of an absent man, and need not, perhaps, have been taken up had the speaker not at once put on his hat and stalked out of the room, and banged the door. It was asserted that a lie may be given by the way in which a door is banged. And yet no club punishes the putting on of hats, or stalking off, or the banging of doors. It was a difficult question, and occupied Frank Houston till two o'clock in the morning, to the exclusion of Gertrude Tringle and Imogene Docimer.

On the Sunday morning he was not up early, nor did he go to church. The contumacious gentleman was a friend of his, whom he knew that no arguments would induce to apologise. He believed also that gentleman No. 3 might have been seen playing cards with gentleman No. 2,—

so that there was no valid excuse for the banging of the door. He was much exercised by the points to be decided, so that when he got into a cab to be taken to Mrs. Docimer's house he had hardly come to any other conclusion than that one which had arisen to him from a comparison between the two young ladies. Imogene was nearly perfect, and Gertrude was as nearly the reverse as a young lady could be with the proper number of eyes in her head and a nose between them. The style of her letter was abominable to him. "Very ill indeed;—as you will understand, if you ever really loved me!" There was a mawkish clap-trap about it which thoroughly disgusted him. Everything from Imogene was straightforward and downright whether it were love or whether it were anger. But then to be settled with an income of £3,000 a year would relieve him from such a load of care!

"And so Tringle père does not see the advantage of such a son-in-law," said Imogene, after the first greetings were over between them. The greetings had been very simple,—just a touch of the hand, just a civil word,—civil, but not in the least tender, just an inclination of the head, and then two seats occupied with all the rug between them.

"Yes, indeed!" said Frank. "The man is a fool, because he will probably get somebody who will behave less well to his daughter, and make a worse use of his money."

"Just so. One can only be astonished at his folly. Is there no hope left?"

"A glimmer there is."

"Oh, indeed!"

"I got a letter last night from my lady-love, in which she tells me that she is very ill, and that her sickness is working upon her father's bowels."

"Frank!"

"It is the proper language;—working upon her father's bowels of compassion. Fathers always have bowels of compassion at last."

"You will return then, of course?"

"What do you say?"

"As for myself,—or as for you?"

"As a discreet and trusty counsellor. To me you have always been a trusty counsellor."

"Then I should put a few things into a bag, go down to Merle Park, and declare that, in spite of all the edicts that ever came from a father's mouth, you cannot absent yourself while you know that your Gertrude is ill."

"And so prepare a new cousin for you to press to your bosom."

"If you can endure her for always, why should not I for an hour or two, now and again?"

"Why not, indeed? In fact, Imogene, this enduring, and not enduring,—even this living, and not living,—is, after all, but an affair of the imagination. Who can tell but, that as years roll on, she may be better-looking even than you."

"Certainly."

"And have as much to say for herself?"

"A great deal more that is worth hearing."

"And behave herself as a mother of a family with quite as much propriety?"

"In all that I do not doubt that she would be my superior."

"More obedient I am sure she would be."

"Or she would be very disobedient."

"And then she can provide me and my children with ample comforts."

"Which I take it is the real purpose for which a wife should be married."

"Therefore," said he,—and then he stopped.

"And therefore there should be no doubt."

"Though I hate her," he said, clenching his fist with violence as he spoke, "with every fibre of my heart,—still you think there should be no doubt?"

"That, Frank, is violent language,—and foolish."

"And though I love you so intensely that whenever I see her the memory of you becomes an agony to me."

"Such language is only more violent and more foolish."

"Surely not, if I have made up my mind at last, that I never will willingly see Miss Tringle again." Here he got up, and walking across the rug, stood over her, and waited as though expecting some word from her. But she, putting her two hands up to her head, and brushing her hair away from her forehead, looked up to him for what further words might come to him. "Surely not," he continued, "if I have made up my mind at last, that nothing shall ever again serve to rob me of your love,—if I may still hope to possess it."

"Oh, Frank!" she said, "how mean I am to be a creature obedient to the whistle of such a master as you!"

"But are you obedient?"

"You know that well enough. I have had no Gertrude with whom I have vacillated, whether for the sake of love or lucre. Whatever you may be,—whether mean or noble,—you are the only man with whom I can endure to live, for whom I would endure to die. Of course I had not expected that your love should be like mine. How should it be so, seeing that you are a man and that I am but a woman." Here he attempted to seat himself by her on the sofa, which she occupied, but she gently repulsed him, motioning him towards the chair which he had occupied. "Sit there, Frank," she said, "so that we may look into each other's faces and talk seriously. Is it to come to this then, that I am to ruin you at last?"

"There will be no ruin."

"But there will, if we are married now. Shall I tell you the kind of life which would satisfy me?"

"Some little place abroad?" he asked.

"Oh, dear, no! No place to which you would be confined at all. If I may remain as I am, knowing that you intend to marry no one else, feeling confident that there is a bond binding us together even though we should never become man and wife, I should be, if not happy, at least contented."

"That is a cold prospect."

"Cold;—but not ice-cold, as would have been the other. Cold, but not wretchedly cold, as would be the idea always

present to me that I had reduced you to poverty. Frank, I am so far selfish that I cannot bear to abandon the idea of your love. But I am not so far selfish as to wish to possess it at the expense of your comfort. Shall it be so?"

"Be how?" said he, speaking almost in anger.

"Let us remain just as we are. Only you will promise me, that as I cannot be your wife there shall be no other. I need hardly promise you that there will be no other husband." Now he sat frowning at her, while she, still pressing back her hair with her hands, looked eagerly into his face. "If this will be enough for you," she said, "it shall be enough for me."

"No, by G—d!"

"Frank!"

"It will certainly not be enough for me. I will have nothing to do with so damnable a compact."

"Damnable!"

"Yes; that is what I call it. That is what any man would call it,—and any woman, too, who would speak her mind."

"Then, Sir, perhaps you will be kind enough to make your proposition. I have made mine, such as it is, and am sorry that it should not have been received at any rate with courtesy." But as she said this there was a gleam of a bright spirit in her eyes, such as he had not seen since first the name of Gertrude had been mentioned to her.

"Yes," said he. "You have made your proposition, and now it is only fair that I should make mine. Indeed, I made it already when I suggested that little place abroad.

Let it be abroad or at home, or of what nature it may,—so that you shall be there, and I with you, it shall be enough for me. That is my proposition; and, if it be not accepted, then I shall return to Miss Tringle and all the glories of Lombard Street.”

“Frank——” she said. Then, before she could speak another word, he had risen from his seat, and she was in his arms. “Frank,” she continued, pushing back his kisses, “how impossible it is that I should not be obedient to you in all things! I know,—I know that I am agreeing to that which will cause you some day to repent.”

“By heavens, no!” said he. “I am changed in all that.”

“A man cannot change at once. Your heart is soft, but your nature remains the same. Frank, I could be so happy at this moment if I could forget the picture which my imagination points to me of your future life. Your love, and your generous words, and the look out of your dear eyes, are sweet to me now, as when I was a child, whom you first made so proud by telling her that she owned your heart. If I could only revel in the return of your affections——”

“It is no return,” said he. “There has never been a moment in which my affections have not been the same.”

“Well, then,—in these permitted signs of your affection,—if it were not that I cannot shut out the future! Do not press me to name any early day, because no period of my future life will be so happy to me as this.”

* * * * *

"Is there any reason why I should not intrude?" said Mrs. Docimer, opening the door when the above conversation had been extended for perhaps another hour.

"Not in the least, as far as I'm concerned," said Frank. "A few words have been spoken between us, all of which may be repeated to you if Imogene can remember them."

"Every one of them," said Imogene; "but I hardly think that I shall repeat them."

"I suppose they have been very much a matter of course," said Mrs. Docimer; — "the old story repeated between you two for the fourth or fifth time. Considering all things, do you think that I should congratulate you?"

"I ask for no congratulation," said Imogene.

"You may certainly congratulate me," said Frank. After that the conversation became tame, and the happy lover soon escaped from the house into the street. When there he found very much to occupy his mind. He had certainly made his resolution at last, and had done so in a manner which would now leave him no power of retrogression. The whole theory of his life had,—with a vengeance,—been thrown to the winds. "The little place abroad,"—or elsewhere,—was now a settled certainty. He had nearly got the better of her. He had all but succeeded in putting down his own love and hers by a little gentle ridicule, and by a few half-wise phrases which she at the moment had been unable to answer; but she now had in truth vanquished him by the absolute sincerity of her love.

CHAPTER XLII.

ANOTHER DUEL.

FRANK HOUSTON on that Sunday afternoon became an altered man. The reader is not to suppose by this that he is declared to have suddenly thrown off all his weaknesses, and to have succeeded in clothing himself in an armour of bright steel, proof for the rest of his life against all temptations. Such suits of armour are not to be had at a moment's notice ; nor, as I fear, can a man ever acquire one quite perfect at all points who has not begun to make it for himself before Houston's age. But he did on that day dine off the two mutton chops, and comforted himself with no more than the half-pint of sherry. It was a great beginning. Throughout the whole evening he could not be got for a moment to join any of the club juntas which were discussing the great difficulty of the contumacious gentleman. "I think he must really be going to be married at last!" one club pundit said when a question was asked as to Houston's singular behaviour on the occasion.

He was indeed very sober,—so sober that he left the smoking-room as soon as his one silent cigar was finished,

and went out alone in order that he might roam the streets in thoughtful solitude. It was a clear frosty night, and as he buttoned his great coat around him he felt that the dry cold air would do him good, and assist his meditations. At last then everything was arranged for him, and he was to encounter exactly that mode of life which he had so often told himself to be most unfit for him. There were to be the cradles always full, and his little coffer so nearly empty! And he had done it all for himself. She, Imogene, had proposed a mode of life to him which would at any rate have saved him from this; but it had been impossible that he should accept a plan so cruel to her when the proposition came from herself. It must all soon be done now. She had asked that a distant day might be fixed for their marriage. Even that request, coming from her, made it almost imperative upon him to insist upon an early day. It would be well for him to look upon to-morrow, or a few morrows whose short distance would be immaterial as the time fixed.

No;—there should be no going back now! So he declared to himself, endeavouring to prepare the suit of armour for his own wearing. Pau might be the best place, —or perhaps one of those little towns in Brittany. Dresden would not do, because there would be society at Dresden, and he must of course give up all ideas of society. He would have liked Rome; but Rome would be far too expensive, and then residents in Rome require to be absent three or four months every year. He and his wife and large family,—he had no doubt in life as to the large

family,—would not be able to allow themselves any recreation such as that. He thought he had heard that the ordinary comforts of life were cheap in the west of Ireland,—or, if not cheap, unobtainable, which would be the same thing. Perhaps Castlebar might be a good locality for his nursery. There would be nothing to do at Castlebar,—no amusement whatever for such a one as himself, no fitting companion for Imogene. But then amusement for himself and companions for Imogene must of course be out of the question. He thought that perhaps he might turn his hand to a little useful gardening,—parsnips instead of roses,—while Imogene would be at work in the nursery. He would begin at once and buy two or three dozen pipes, because tobacco would be so much cheaper than cigars. He knew a shop at which were to be had some very pretty new-fashioned meerschaums, which, he had been told, smokers of pipes found to be excellent. But, whether it should be Pau or whether it should be Castlebar, whether it should be pipes or whether, in regard to economy, no tobacco at all, the question now was at any rate settled for him. He felt rather proud of his gallantry, as he took himself home to bed, declaring to himself that he would answer that last letter from Gertrude in a very few words and in a very decided tone.

There would be many little troubles. On the Monday morning he got up early thinking that as a family man such a practice would be necessary for him. When he had disturbed the house and nearly driven his own servant mad by demanding breakfast at an altogether unaccustomed hour,

he found that he had nothing to do. There was that head of Imogene for which she had only once sat, and at which he had occasionally worked from memory because of her refusal to sit again; and he thought for a moment that this might be good employment for him now. But his art was only an expense to him. He could not now afford for himself paint and brushes and canvas, so he turned the half-finished head round upon his easel. Then he took out his banker's book, a bundle of bills and some blotted scraps of ruled paper, with which he set himself to work to arrange his accounts. When he did this he must certainly have been in earnest. But he had not as yet succeeded in seeing light through his figures when he was interrupted by the arrival of a letter which altogether arrested his attention. It was from Mudbury Docimer, and this was the letter ;—

“DEAR HOUSTON,

“Of course I think that you and Imogene are two fools. She has told me what took place here yesterday, and I have told her the same as I tell you. I have no power to prevent it; but you know as well as I do that you and she cannot live together on the interest of sixteen thousand pounds. When you've paid everything that you owe I don't suppose there will be so much as that. It had been arranged between you that everything should be over; and if I had thought that anything of the kind would have occurred again I would have told them not to let you into the house. What is the good of two such people as you making yourselves wretched for ever, just to satisfy the

romance of a moment? I call it wicked. So I told Imogene, and so I tell you.

"You have changed your mind so often that of course you may change it again. I am sure that Imogene expects that you will. Indeed I can hardly believe that you intend to be such a Quixote. But at any rate I have done my duty. She is old enough to look after herself, but as long as she lives with me as my sister I shall tell her what I think; and until she becomes your wife,—which I hope she never will be,—I shall tell you the same.

"Yours truly,

"MUDBURY DOCIMER."

"He always was a hard, unfeeling fellow," said Frank to himself. Then he put the letter by with a crowd of others, assuring himself that it was one which required no answer.

On the afternoon he called at the house, as he did again on the Tuesday; but on neither day did he succeed in seeing Imogene. This he thought to be hard, as the pleasure of her society was as sweet to him as ever, though he was doubtful as to his wisdom in marrying her. On the Wednesday morning he received a note from her asking him not to come at once, because Mudbury had chosen to put himself into a bad humour. Then a few words of honey were added; "Of course you know that nothing that he can say will make a change. I am too well satisfied to allow of any change that shall not come from you yourself." He was quite alive to the sweetness of the honey, and

declared to himself that Mudbury Docimer's ill-humour was a matter to him of no concern whatever.

But on the Wednesday there came also another letter,—in regard to which it will be well that we should travel down again to Merle Park. An answer altogether averse to the proposed changes as to the nieces had been received from Mrs. Dosett. “As Ayala does not wish it, of course nothing can be done.” Such was the decision as conveyed by Mrs. Dosett. It seemed to Lady Tringle that this was absurd. It was all very well extending charity to the children of her deceased sister, Mrs. Dormer; but all the world was agreed that beggars should not be choosers. “As Ayala does not wish it.” Why should not Ayala wish it? What a fool must Ayala be not to wish it? Why should not Ayala be made to do as she was told, whether she wished it or not? Such were the indignant questions which Lady Tringle asked of her husband. He was becoming sick of the young ladies altogether,—of her own girls as well as the Dormer girls. “They are a pack of idiots together,” he said, “and Tom is the worst of the lot.” With this he rushed off to London, and consoled himself with his millions.

Mrs. Dosett's letter had reached Merle Park on the Tuesday morning, Sir Thomas having remained down in the country over the Monday. Gertrude, having calculated the course of the post with exactness, had hoped to get a reply from Frank to that last letter of hers,—dated from her sick bed, but written in truth after a little surreptitious visit to the larder after the servants' dinner,—on the Sun-

day morning. This had been possible, and would have evinced a charming alacrity on the part of her lover. But this she had hardly ventured to expect. Then she had looked with anxiety to the arrival of letters on the Monday afternoon, but had looked in vain. On the Tuesday morning she had felt so certain that she had contrived to open the post-bag herself in spite of illness;—but there had been nothing for her. Then she sent the dispatch which reached Frank on the Wednesday morning, and immediately afterwards took to her bed again with such a complication of disorders that the mare with the broken knees was sent at once into Hastings for the doctor.

“A little rice will be the best thing for her,” said the doctor.

“But the poor child takes nothing,—literally nothing,” said Lady Tringle, who was frightened for her child. Then the doctor went on to say that arrowroot would be good, and sago, but offered no other prescription. Lady Tringle was disgusted by his ignorance, and thought that it might be well to send up to London for some great man. The doctor bowed, and made up his mind that Lady Tringle was an ass. But, being an honest man, and also tender-hearted, he contrived to get hold of Tom before he left the house.

“Your sister’s health is generally good?” he said. Tom assented. As far as he knew, Gertrude had always been as strong as a horse. “Eats well?” asked the doctor. Tom, who occasionally saw the family at lunch, gave a description of his sister’s general performance.

"She is a fine healthy young lady," said the doctor. Tom gave a brother's ready adhesion to the word healthy, but passed over the other epithet as being superfluous. "Now, I'll tell you what it is," said the doctor. "Of course I don't want to inquire into any family secrets."

"My father, you know," said Tom, "won't agree about the man she's engaged to."

"That is it? I knew there was some little trouble, but I did not want to ask any questions. Your mother is unnecessarily frightened, and I have not wished to disturb her. Your sister is taking plenty of nourishment?"

"She does not come to table, nor yet have it in her own room."

"She gets it somehow. I can say that it is so. Her veins are full, and her arms are strong. Perhaps she goes into the kitchen. Have a little tray made ready for her, with something nice. She will be sure to find it, and when she has found it two or three times she will know that she has been discovered. If Lady Tringle does send for a physician from London you could perhaps find an opportunity of telling him what I have suggested. Her mamma need know nothing about it." This took place on the Tuesday, and on the Wednesday morning Gertrude knew that she had been discovered,—at any rate by Tom and the doctor. "I took care to keep a wing for you," said Tom; "I carved them myself at dinner." As he so addressed her he came out from his hiding-place in the kitchen about midnight, and surprised her in the larder. She gave a fearful scream, which, however, luckily was not heard

through the house. "You won't tell mamma, Tom, will you?" Tom promised that he would not, on condition that she would come down to breakfast on the following morning. This she did, and the London physician was saved a journey.

But, in the meantime, Gertrude's second letter had gone up to Frank, and also a very heartrending epistle from Lady Tringle to her husband. "Poor Gertrude is in a very bad state. If ever there was a girl really broken-hearted on account of love, she is one. I did not think she would ever set her heart upon a man with such violent affection. I do think you might give way when it becomes a question of life and death. There isn't anything really against Mr. Houston." Sir Thomas, as he read this, was a little shaken. He had hitherto been inclined to agree with Rosalind, "That men have died from time to time, and worms have eaten them, but not for love." But now he did not know what to think about it. There was Tom undoubtedly in a bad way, and here was Gertrude brought to such a condition, simply by her love, that she refused to take her meals regularly! Was the world come to such a pass that a father was compelled to give his daughter with a large fortune to an idle adventurer, or else to be responsible for his daughter's life? Would Augusta have pined away and died had she not been allowed to marry her Traffick? Would Lucy pine and die unless money were given to her sculptor? Upon the whole, Sir Thomas thought that the cares of his family were harder to bear than those of his millions. In regard to Gertrude, he almost thought that he

would give way, if only that he might be rid of that trouble.

It must be acknowledged that Frank Houston, when he received the young lady's letter, was less soft-hearted than her father. The letter was, or should have been, heart-rending;—

“YOU CRUEL MAN,

“You must have received my former letter, and though I told you that I was ill and almost dying you have not heeded it! Three posts have come, and I have not had a line from you. In your last you were weak enough to say that you were going to give it all up because you could not make papa do just what you wanted all at once. Do you know what it is to have taken possession of a young lady's heart; or is it true, as Augusta says of you, that you care for nothing but the money? If it is so, say it at once and let me die. As it is I am so very ill that I cannot eat a mouthful of anything, and have hardly strength left to me to write this letter.

“But I cannot really believe what Augusta says, though I daresay it may have been so with Mr. Traffick. Perhaps you have not been to your club, and so you have not got my former letter. Or it may be that you are ill yourself. If so, I do wish that I could come and nurse you, though indeed I am so ill that I am quite unable to leave my bed.

“At any rate, pray write immediately;—and do come! Mamma seems to think that papa will give way because I am so ill. If so, I shall think my illness the luckiest thing

in the world.—You must believe, dearest Frank, that I am now, as ever, yours most affectionately,

“GERTRUDE.”

Frank Houston was less credulous than Sir Thomas, and did not believe much in the young lady's sickness. It was evident that the young lady was quite up to the work of deceiving her father and mother, and would no doubt be willing to deceive himself if anything could be got by it. But, whether she were ill or whether she were well, he could offer her no comfort. Nevertheless, he was bound to send her some answer, and with a troubled spirit he wrote as follows;—

“MY DEAR MISS TRINGLE,

“It is to me a matter of inexpressible grief that I should have to explain again that I am unable to persist in seeking the honour of your hand in opposition to the absolute and repeated refusals which I have received from your father. It is so evident that we could not marry without his consent that I need not now go into that matter. But I think myself bound to say that, considering the matter in all its bearing, I must regard our engagement as finally at an end. Were I to hesitate in saying this very plainly I think I should be doing you an injury.

“I am sorry to hear that you are unwell, and trust that you may soon recover your health.

“Your sincere friend,

“FRANK HOUSTON.”

On the next morning Gertrude was still in her bed, having there received her letter, when she sent a message to her brother. Would Tom come and see her? Tom attended to her behest, and then sat down by her bedside on being told in a mysterious voice that she had to demand from him a great service. "Tom," she said, "that man has treated me most shamefully and most falsely."

"What man?"

"What man? Why, Frank Houston. There has never been any other man. After all that has been said and done he is going to throw me over."

"The governor threw him over," said Tom.

"That amounts to nothing. The governor would have given way, of course, and if he hadn't that was no matter of his. After he had had my promise he was bound to go on with it. Don't you think so?"

"Perhaps he was," said Tom, dubiously.

"Of course he was. What else is the meaning of a promise? Now I'll tell you what you must do. You must go up to London and find him out. You had better take a stick with you, and then ask him what he means to do."

"And if he says he'll do nothing?"

"Then, Tom, you should call him out. It is just the position in which a brother is bound to do that kind of thing for his sister. When he has been called out, then probably he'll come round, and all will be well."

The prospect was one which Tom did not at all like. He had had one duel on his hands on his own account, and

had not as yet come through it with flying colours. There were still moments in which he felt that he would be compelled at last to take to violence in reference to Colonel Stubbs. He was all but convinced that were he to do so he would fall into some great trouble, but still it was more than probable that his outraged feelings would not allow him to resist. But this second quarrel was certainly unnecessary. "That's all nonsense, Gertrude," he said, "I can do nothing of the kind."

"You will not?"

"Certainly not. It would be absurd. You ask Septimus and he will tell you that it is so."

"Septimus, indeed!"

"At any rate, I won't. Men don't call each other out now-a-days. I know what ought to be done in these kind of things, and such interference as that would be altogether improper."

"Then, Tom," said she, raising herself in bed, and looking round upon him, "I will never call you my brother again!"

CHAPTER XLIII.

ONCE MORE !

“ PROBABLY you are not aware, Sir, that I am not at present the young lady’s guardian.” This was said at the office in Lombard Street by Sir Thomas, in answer to an offer made to him by Captain Batsby for Ayala’s hand. Captain Batsby had made his way boldly into the great man’s inner room, and had there declared his purpose in a short and business-like manner. He had an ample income of his own, he said, and was prepared to make a proper settlement on the young lady. If necessary, he would take her without any fortune ;—but it would, of course, be for the lady’s comfort and for his own if something in the way of money were forthcoming. So much he added, having heard of this uncle’s enormous wealth, and having also learned the fact that if Sir Thomas were not at this moment Ayala’s guardian he had been not long ago. Sir Thomas listened to him with patience, and then replied to him as above.

“ Just so, Sir Thomas. I did hear that. But I think you were once ; and you are still her uncle.”

“ Yes ; I am her uncle.”

“And when I was so ill-treated in Kingsbury Crescent I thought I would come to you. It could not be right that a gentleman making an honourable proposition,—and very liberal, as you must acknowledge,—should not be allowed to see the young lady. It was not as though I did not know her. I had been ten days in the same house with her. Don't you think, Sir Thomas, I ought to have been allowed to see her?”

“I have nothing to do with her,” said Sir Thomas;—“that is, in the way of authority.” Nevertheless, before Captain Batsby left him, he became courteous to that gentleman, and though he could not offer any direct assurance he acknowledged that the application was reasonable. He was, in truth, becoming tired of Ayala, and would have been glad to find a husband whom she would accept, so that she might be out of Tom's way. He had been quite willing that Tom should marry the girl if it were possible, but he began to be convinced that it was impossible. He had offered again to open his house to her, with all its wealth, but she had refused to come into it. His wife had told him that, if Ayala could be brought back in place of Lucy, she would surely yield. But Ayala would not allow herself to be brought back. And there was Tom as bad as ever. If Ayala were once married then Tom could go upon his travels, and come back, no doubt, a sane man. Sir Thomas thought it might be well to make inquiry about this Captain, and then see if a marriage might be arranged. Mrs. Dossett, he told himself, was a hard, stiff woman, and would never get the girl married unless she

allowed such a suitor as this Captain Batsby to have access to the house. He did make inquiry, and before the week was over had determined that if Ayala would become Mrs. Batsby there might probably be an end to one of his troubles.

As he went down to Merle Park he arranged his plan. He would, in the first place, tell Tom that Ayala had as many suitors as Penelope, and that one had come up now who would probably succeed. But when he reached home he found that his son was gone. Tom had taken a sudden freak, and had run up to London. "He seemed quite to have got a change," said Lady Tringle.

"I hope it was a change for the better as to that stupid girl." Lady Tringle could not say that there had been any change for the better, but she thought that there had been a change about the girl. Tom had, as she said, quite "brisked up," had declared that he was not going to stand this thing any longer, had packed up three or four port-manteaus, and had had himself carried off to the nearest railway station in time for an afternoon train up to London. "What is he going to do when he gets there?" asked Sir Thomas. Lady Tringle had no idea what her son intended to do, but thought that something special was intended in regard to Ayala.

"He is an ass," said the father.

"You always say he is an ass," said the mother, complaining.

"No doubt I do. What else am I to call him?" Then he went on and developed his scheme. "Let Ayala be

asked to Merle Park for a week,—just for a week,—and assured that during that time Tom would not be there. Then let Captain Batsby also be invited.” Upon this there followed an explanation as to Captain Batsby and his aspirations. Tom must be relieved after some fashion, and Sir Thomas declared that no better fashion seemed to present itself. Lady Tringle received her orders with sundry murmurings, still grieving for her son’s grief;—but she assented, as she always did assent, to her husband’s propositions.

Now we will accompany Tom up to London. The patient reader will perhaps have understood the condition of his mind when in those days of his sharpest agony he had given himself up to Faddle and champagne. By these means he had brought himself into trouble and disgrace, of which he was fully conscious. He had fallen into the hands of the police and had been harassed during the whole period by headache and nausea. Then had come the absurdity of his challenge to Colonel Stubbs, the folly of which had been made plain to him by the very letter which his rival had written to him. There was good sense enough about the poor fellow to enable him to understand that the police court, and the prison, that Faddle and the orgies at Bolivia’s, that his challenge and the reply to it, were alike dishonourable to him. Then had come a reaction, and he spent a miserable fortnight down at Merle Park, doing nothing, resolving on nothing, merely moping about and pouring the oft-repeated tale of his woes into his mother’s bosom. These days at Merle Park gave him back at any

rate his health, and rescued him from the intense wretchedness of his condition on the day after the comparison of Bolivia's wines. In this improved state he told himself that it behoved him even yet to do something as a man, and he came suddenly to the bold resolution of having,—as he called it to himself,—another “dash at Ayala.”

How the “dash” was to be made he had not determined when he left home. But to this he devoted the whole of the following Sunday. He had received a lachrymose letter from his friend Faddle, at Aberdeen, in which the unfortunate youth had told him that he was destined to remain in that wretched northern city for the rest of his natural life. He had not as yet been to the Mountaineers since his mishap with the police, and did not care to show himself there at present. He was therefore altogether alone, and, walking all alone the entire round of the parks, he at last formed his resolution.

On the following morning when Mr. Dosett entered his room at Somerset House, a little after half-past ten o'clock, he found his nephew Tom there before him, and waiting for him. Mr. Dosett was somewhat astonished, for he too had heard of Tom's misfortunes. Some ill-natured chronicle of Tom's latter doings had spread itself among the Tringle and Dosett sets, and Uncle Reginald was aware that his nephew had been forced to relinquish his stool in Lombard Street. The vices of the young are perhaps too often exaggerated, so that Mr. Dosett had heard of an amount of champagne consumed and a number of policemen wounded, of which his nephew had not been altogether guilty. There

was an idea at Kingsbury Crescent that Tom had gone nearly mad, and was now kept under paternal care at Merle Park. When, therefore, he saw Tom blooming in health, and brighter than usual in general appearance, he was no doubt rejoiced, but also surprised, at the change. "What, Tom!" he said; "I'm glad to see you looking so well. Are you up in London again?"

"I'm in town for a day or two," said Tom.

"And what can I do for you?"

"Well, Uncle Reginald, you can do a great deal for me if you will. Of course you've heard of all those rows of mine?"

"I have heard something."

"Everybody has heard," said Tom, mournfully. "I don't suppose anybody was ever knocked so much about as I've been for the last six months."

"I'm sorry for that, Tom."

"I'm sure you are, because you're always good-natured. Now I wonder if you will do a great thing to oblige me."

"Let us hear what it is," said Uncle Reginald.

"I suppose you know that there is only one thing in the world that I want." Mr. Dossett thought that it would be discreet to make no reply to this, but, turning his chair partly round, he prepared to listen very attentively to what his nephew might have to say to him. "All this about the policeman and the rest of it has simply come from my being so unhappy about Ayala."

"It wouldn't be taken as a promise of your being a good husband, Tom, when you get into such a mess as that."

"That's because people don't understand," said Tom. "It is because I am so earnest about it, and because I can't bear the disappointment! There isn't one at Travers and Treason who doesn't know that if I'd married Ayala I should have settled down as quiet a young man as there is in all London. You ask the governor else himself. As long as I thought there was any hope I used to be there steady as a rock at half-past nine. Everybody knew it. So I should again, if she'd only come round."

"You can't make a lady come round, as you call it."

"Not make her; no. Of course you can't make a girl. But persuading goes a long way. Why shouldn't she have me? As to all these rows, she ought to feel at any rate that they're her doing. And what she's done it stands to reason she could undo if she would. It only wants a word from her to put me all right with the governor,—and to put me all right with Travers and Treason too. Nobody can love her as I do."

"I do believe that nobody could love her better," said Mr. Dosett, who was beginning to be melted by his nephew's earnestness.

"Oughtn't that to go for something? And then she would have everything that she wishes. She might live anywhere she pleased,—so that I might go to the office every day. She would have her own carriage, you know."

"I don't think that would matter much with Ayala."

"It shows that I'm in a position to ask her," said Tom. "If she could only bring herself not to hate me——"

"There is a difference, Tom, between hating and not loving."

"If she would only begin to make a little way, then I could hope again. Uncle Reginald, could you not tell her that at any rate I would be good to her?"

"I think you would be good to her," he said.

"Indeed, I would. There is nothing I would not do for her. Now will you let me see her just once again, and have one other chance?"

This was the great thing which Tom desired from his uncle, and Mr. Dosett was so much softened by his nephew's earnestness that he did promise to do as much as this;—to do as much as this, at least, if it were in his power. Of course, Ayala must be told. No good could be done by surprising her by a visit. But he would endeavour so to arrange it that, if Tom were to come to him on the following afternoon, they two should go to the Crescent together, and then Tom should remain and dine there,—or go away before dinner, as he might please, after the interview. This was settled, and Tom left Somerset House, rejoicing greatly at his success. It seemed to him that now at last a way was open to him.

Uncle Reginald, on his return home, took his niece aside and talked to her very gently and very kindly. "Whether you like him or whether you do not, my dear, he is so true to you that you are bound to see him again when he asks it." At first she was very stout, declaring that she would not see him. Of what good could it be, seeing that she

would rather throw herself into the Thames than marry him? Had she not told him so over and over again, as often as he had spoken to her? Why would he not just leave her alone? But against all this her uncle pleaded gently but persistently. He had considered himself bound to promise so much on her behalf, and for his sake she must do as he asked. To this, of course, she yielded. And then he said many good things of poor Tom. His constancy was a great virtue. A man so thoroughly in love would no doubt make a good husband. And then there would be the assent of all the family, and an end, as far as Ayala was concerned, of all pecuniary trouble. In answer to this she only shook her head, promising, however, that she would be ready to give Tom an audience when he should be brought to the Crescent on the following day.

Punctually at four Tom made his appearance at Somerset House, and started with his uncle as soon as the index-books had been put in their places. Tom was very anxious to take his uncle home in a cab, but Mr. Dosett would not consent to lose his walk. Along the Embankment they went, and across Charing Cross into St. James's Park, and then by Green Park, Hyde Park, and Kensington Gardens, all the way to Notting Hill. Mr. Dosett did not walk very fast, and Tom thought they would never reach Kingsbury Crescent. His uncle would fain have talked about the weather, or politics, or the hardships of the Civil Service generally; but Tom would not be diverted from his one subject. Would Ayala be gracious to him? Mr. Dosett had made up his mind to say nothing on the subject. Tom

must plead his own cause. Uncle Reginald thought that he knew such pleading would be useless, but still would not say a word to daunt the lover. Neither could he say a word expressive of hope. As they were fully an hour-and-a-half on their walk, this reticence was difficult.

Immediately on his arrival, Tom was taken up into the drawing-room. This was empty, for it had been arranged that Mrs. Dosett should be absent till the meeting was over. "Now I'll look for this child," said Uncle Reginald, in his cheeriest voice as he left Tom alone in the room. Tom, as he looked round at the chairs and tables, remembered that he had never received as much as a kind word or look in the room, and then great drops of perspiration broke out all over his brow. All that he had to hope for in the world must depend upon the next five minutes;—might depend perhaps upon the very selection of the words which he might use.

Then Ayala entered the room and stood before him.

"Ayala," he said, giving her his hand.

"Uncle Reg. says that you would like to see me once again."

"Of course I want to see you once, and twice,—and always. Ayala, if you could know it! If you could only know it!" Then he clasped his two hands high upon his breast, not as though appealing to her heart, but striking his bosom in very agony. "Ayala, I feel that, if I do not have you as my own, I can only die for the want of you. Ayala, do you believe me?"

"I suppose I believe you, but how can I help it?"

"Try to help it! Try to try and help it! Say a word that you will perhaps help it by-and-bye." Then there came a dark frown upon her brow,—not, indeed, from anger, but from a feeling that so terrible a task should be thrown upon her. "I know you think that I am common."

"I have never said a word, Tom, but that I could not love you."

"But I am true,—true as the sun. Would I come again after all if it were not that I cannot help coming? You have heard that I have been,—been misbehaving myself?"

"I have not thought about that."

"It has been so because I have been so wretched. Ayala, you have made me so unhappy. Ayala, you can make me the happiest man there is in London this day. I seem to want nothing else. As for drink, or clubs, or billiards, and all that, they are nothing to me,—unless when I try to forget that you are so—so unkind to me!"

"It is not unkind, not to do as you ask me."

"To do as I ask you,—that would be kind. Oh, Ayala, cannot you be kind to me?" She shook her head, still standing in the place which she had occupied from the beginning. "May I come again? Will you give me three months, and then think of it? If you would only say that, I would go back to my work and never leave it." But she still shook her head. "Must I never hope?"

"Not for that, Tom. How can I help it?"

"Not help it."

"No. How can I help it? One does not fall in love by trying,—nor by trying prevent it."

"By degrees you might love me,—a little." She had said all that she knew how to say, and again shook her head. "It is that accursed Colonel," he exclaimed, forgetting himself as he thought of his rival.

"He is not accursed," said Ayala, angrily.

"Then you love him?"

"No! But you should not ask. You have no right to ask. It is not proper."

"You are not engaged to him?"

"No; I am not engaged to him. I do not love him. As you will ask, I tell you. But you should not ask; and he is not accursed. He is better than you,—though I do not love him. You should not have driven me to say this. I do not ask you questions."

"There is none that I would not answer. Stay, Ayala," for now she was going to leave the room. "Stay yet a moment. Do you know that you are tearing my heart in pieces? Why is it that you should make me so wretched? Dear Ayala;—dearest Ayala;—stay yet a moment."

"Tom, there is nothing more that I can say. I am very, very sorry if you are unhappy. I do think that you are good and true; and if you will shake hands with me, there is my hand. But I cannot say what you want me to say." Tom took her by the hand and tried to hold her, without, however, speaking to her again. But she slid away from him and left the room, not having for a moment sat down in his presence.

When the door was closed he stood awhile looking round him, trying to resolve what he might do or what he might say next. He was now at any rate in the house with her, and did not know whether such an opportunity as that might ever occur to him again. He felt that there were words within his bosom which, if he could only bring them up to his mouth, would melt the heart of a stone. There was his ineffable love, his whole happiness at stake, his purpose,—his holy purpose,—to devote himself, and all that he had, to her well-being. Of all this he had a full conception within his own heart, if only he could express it so that others should believe him! But of what use was it now? He had had this further liberty of speech accorded to him, and in it he had done nothing, made no inch of progress. She had hardly spoken a dozen words to him, but of those she had spoken two remained clear upon his memory. He must never hope, she had said; and she had said also that that other man was better than he. Had she said that he was dearer, the word would hardly have been more bitter. All the old feeling came upon him of rage against his rival, and of a desire that something desperate should be done by which he might wreak his vengeance.

But there he was standing alone in Mrs. Dosett's drawing-room, and it was necessary that he should carry himself off. As for dining in that house, sitting down to eat and drink in Ayala's presence after such a conversation as that which was past, that he felt to be quite out of the question. He crammed his hat upon his head, left the room, and hurried down the stairs towards the door.

In the passage he was met by his uncle, coming out of the dining-room. "Tom," he said, "you'll stay and eat your dinner?"

"No, indeed," said Tom, angrily.

"You shouldn't let yourself be disturbed by little trifles such as these," said his uncle, trying to put a good face upon the matter.

"Trifles!" said Tom Tringle. "Trifles!" And he banged the door after him as he left the house.

END OF VOL. II.



